Review of Service Treatment Records (STRs) for Benefits Delivered at Discharge (BDD)

Trainee Handout

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Objectives

* Identify the types of records found in STRs.
* Understand how the individual records are formatted (SOAP).
* Identify methods for the review of STRs.
* Identify methods for the routine handling of STRs.

References

All M21-1 references are located in the [Live Manual Website](https://ssologon.iam.va.gov/CentralLogin/Default.aspx?appname=core&URL=https://ssologon.iam.va.gov/CentralLogin/core/redirect.aspx&TYPE=33619969&REALMOID=06-d403f59d-c057-477f-9c49-c0d2a2d13e2b&GUID=&SMAUTHREASON=0&METHOD=GET&SMAGENTNAME=$SM$Dc1iJnfj0EDnZgoGbQhY8pxQ5cSvKdwMq%2fM4NhznJAhElAp4fDXcFkTew7jYCcYk&TARGET=$SM$HTTPS%3a%2f%2fvaww%2ecompensation%2epension%2ekm%2eva%2egov%2fsystem%2ftemplates%2fselfservice%2fva_ka%2fportal%2ehtml%3fportalid%3d554400000001034)

* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.A – General Information on Service Records](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014154/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-iii-Chapter-2-Section-A-General-Information-on-Service-Records)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.G – Folder Maintenance](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?articleViewContext=article_view_browse_tree&isFeatured=undefined&topic=undefined)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.B.3.j – Associating Health Records Located in the JLV](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014155/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-iii-Chapter-2-Section-B-Migration-of-Service-Records-and-the-Procedures-for-Obtaining-Them)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 1.C.8.d – Requesting OPTRS from an MTF](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014156/)

Topic 1: Overview of STRs

**General Information in STRs**

The following information can be located within STRs:

* Entrance and separation physical exams
	+ BDD participants may have previous periods of service to reflect additional separation examinations.
	+ Entrance exams which are not located within the STRs may be found to be part of the claimant’s personnel records.
* Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) and Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) reports
* Preventative and chronic care flow sheets
* Hearing conservation data
* Physical therapy and x-ray reports
* Emergency treatment reports

**Documents not found in STRs**

The following information is not found in standard STRs:

* Behavioral Health Records
* Surgical Records
* Line of Duty Determinations

Review of STRs Forms Demonstration

***Instructor Demonstration***: The purpose of this demonstration is to introduce you to the MEPSS STR Tool.

* Open [Medical EPSS](http://epss.vba.va.gov/mepss)
* Select the Tools tab in the menu bar



* Select the STR Tool Tab (last tab on the right)
* Select Open the Folder
* Select (2) SF 88 Report of Medical Examination
* Select Demographic Information

The Purpose of Examination could be for any number of reasons. MEB, Aviation Annual Examination, Entrance Examination, Exit Examination, etc.

**SOAP Format**

The SOAP format found in treatment records came into use by the military in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some treatment records may use a variation of the common SOAP format shown below.

Common SOAP format:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Letter(s)** | **Meaning** |
| S or H | Subjective summary or history of the patient’s reason for seeking medical advice/help or symptoms experienced |
| O | Objective finding by the treatment provider during the examination |
| A, I, or Dx | Assessment - the diagnosis, or in some cases the provisional diagnosis pending further tests |
| P | Plan for treatment or medication prescribed |

**Other Military Treatment Records**

Military treatment records are also located in:

* Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application (AHLTA)
* Composite Health Care System (CHCS)
* TRICARE
* Joint Legacy Viewer (JLV)

**Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application (AHLTA)**

The military's electronic health record, AHLTA, is an enterprise-wide medical and dental information management system that provides secure online access to Military Health System (MHS) beneficiary’s records.

AHLTA is used by medical clinicians in all fixed and deployed Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) worldwide. AHLTA primarily contains MTF outpatient treatment records.

AHLTA began worldwide deployment in January 2004. The goal is to provide medical readiness and to support more than 9.4 million beneficiaries with continuity of care and administration of benefits.

**Composite Health Care System (CHCS)**

CHCS is a medical database for patients using the military health care system.

CHCS is used to:

* Store MTF inpatient records
* Make and track appointments, enter and track prescriptions, enter and track consults, enter and track tests and results
* Keep a historical record of health care
* Check a patient's eligibility for getting medical appointments
* Update information when patients arrive for appointments or emergency care and to confirm eligibility for care in Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System (DEERS)

**TRICARE**

TRICARE is the health care program serving active duty Service members, National Guard and Reserve members, retirees, their families, survivors, and certain former spouses worldwide.

As a major component of the [MHS](http://www.health.mil), TRICARE brings together the healthcare resources of the uniformed services and supplements them with networks of civilian healthcare professionals, institutions, pharmacies, and suppliers to provide access to high-quality healthcare services while maintaining the capability to support military operations.

**Joint Legacy Viewer (JLV)**

The Joint Legacy Viewer (JLV) provides an integrated read-only view of health data from VA, Department of Defense (DoD) and VA VLER partner sources in a common viewer. JLV delivers health data including mental health from DoD legacy (CHCS), inpatient (Essentris) and outpatient (AHLTA) systems, Theater Medical Data Store, VA VLER partners and all VistA sites.

Like data from all sources is displayed in a single table in chronological order (e.g. all Lab results from all locations). Data can be downloaded and uploaded to the VBMS eFolder. JLV login is provided with existing CPRS or CAPRI credentials.

Topic 2: MSC or Other BDD Claim Processor Responsibilities

**STR Review for BDD**

BDD program requires the Servicemember to submit STRs for the current period of service only. The following are acceptable formats for the STRs:

* photocopies
* compact disc – read only memory (CD-ROM), and
* digital media files transferred by a secure method.

The following guidelines provide the MSC with tools that will help with the efficient review STRs:

* Limit the review as much as possible. Look for key indicators of **chronic disabilities**. Do not waste time reading every page.
* Locate and tab or bookmark in VBMS the entrance and separation physical exams in the STRs. Keep in mind that many of the BDD participants may not have a separation physical exam.
* Tab/bookmark where a claimed condition is located if it is not mentioned on the separation physical exam.
* Write down a list of the potentially claimed conditions to use during the initial interview (if one is conducted) for a reference.

Examples:

* Radiologist report dated 10/01/09 right knee patella femoral syndrome.
* Surgical summary report dated 01/05/10 shrapnel removed right shoulder. Possible scar and residuals of retained shrapnel.

**Entrance and Separation Physical Exams Identification**

In order to identify the entrance and separation physical exams in the STRs, it is necessary to know the dates the Service member entered and separated from service.

When reviewing the STRs, the entrance and separation physical exams can be noted by the status of the Service member. Often the status of the Service member or type of exam is noted as “Civilian” on the entrance examination or “Separation Exam” for a separation physical exam.

**Tabbing STRs in Paper Claim Folders**

It is helpful to tab the Entrance and Separation Physical Exams for future reference.

***Note***: All tabs must be removed prior to sending the information to the scanning contractor.

**Bookmarking STRs in VBMS**

ROs must follow the standardized steps in the table below to bookmark documents in the claims folder for the examiner’s review.

***Important***: While there are multiple bookmark types available in VBMS, when bookmarking evidence for an examiner’s review, ROs must use the medical bookmark.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Step**  | **Action** |
| 1 | Locate the document in which you want to add a bookmark. |
| 2 | Click on the bookmark icon in the TOOLS column. The BOOKMARKS prompt box appears.**screenshot of bookmark icon in the TOOLS column** |
| 3 | For each document in the eFolder that contains information to be reviewed by a VA examiner, select the medical bookmark (heart shape icon).***Example***: The Veteran has claimed a right knee and left shoulder condition. A review of the STRs shows treatment for chondromalacia patella of the right knee and a rotator cuff tear of the left shoulder. An examiner will need to review the records. |
| 4 | In the expanded prompt box that appears, type the* tab name, and
* contention(s) name.

**In the contention box, type tab name and contention name** |
| 5 | * Click the working notes bookmark (note paper icon).
* In the expanded prompt box list
	+ the condition treated, and
	+ the pages where treatment can be found for the relevant conditions.

in the expanded prompt box, condition treated and pages |

Handling Receipt of Original STRs

If the Servicemember (SM) provides original STRs, make a copy of the records and return the originals to the SM the same day.

If the original records cannot be returned to the SM, then return them to the Department of Defense (DoD) at one of the addresses below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Branch of Service** | **Address to Return STRs** |
| Navy | Bureau of Medicine and Surgery7700 Arlington Blvd, Suite 5126Falls Church, VA 22042-5126 |
| Army | AMEDD Record Processing Center3370 Nacogdoches Road, Suite 116San Antonio, TX 78217 |
| Air Force | Air Force Record Processing Center3370 Nacogdoches Road, Suite 116San Antonio, TX 78217 |
| Coast Guard | Commanding OfficerHSWL Service CenterATTN: Central Cell300 E Main St, Suite 1000Norfolk, VA 23510-9109 |

Routine Handling of STRs

Care should be taken in handling STRs on loan to VA. Make all reasonable effort to protect the integrity, appearance, and readability of the service records.

**Avoid**

When handling STRs be sure to avoid:

* Marking on, date stamping, or punching holes in any records received from the service department
* Removing STRs from the STR folder unless necessary for photocopying, if hardcopy STRs are received.

**Exceptions**

The following exceptions can be made:

* DD Forms 214 which may accompany STRs may be stamped or annotated to reflect verification of service
* Protective envelopes may be punched or date stamped as long as the contents are not affected, if hardcopy STRs are received

**Maintain STRs**

STRs are critical for deciding most claims for service-connected benefits. Exercise care to preserve and protect these documents against damage or loss.

***Note***: STRs belong to the respective service departments and are on loan to VA. The STRs are subject to recall by the service department. Various issues may prompt a recall of STRs, including a Veteran returning to active service.