FAQ Document

December AQRS/RQRS Continuing Education Class – Fact Based Error Narratives and Mentoring

1. Who has responsibility for mentoring, the initial QRS or the QRS that performs a peer review?

Answer: Mentoring is the responsibility of the QRS that cited the error. Remember that a peer review is not necessary for errors cited on IPR.

1. Is there a different standard for mentoring errors cited on IPR versus IQR? Is the IPR a teachable moment and the IQR a reporting moment?

Answer: Facts based mentoring should be used for both IPR and IQR errors. Since an IPR is not punitive for quality performance measures, employees are generally more open to discussions. However, the purpose behind mentoring for both review types is the same, to educate and provide guidance to the employee regarding the errors associated with the transaction under review.

1. Can a link be provided to the NWQ playbook on the QRT Homepage?

Answer: Links to the NWQ playbook, as well as other user guides and Job Aids are provided through the live manual where applicable. These links are the best resources as they take you directly to the relevant section of the document associated with the specifically cited error.

1. Can a link to the QRT playbook be provided on the QRT Homepage?

Answer: The QRT manual is provided in CPKM under the link for M21-4 Manual. Local QRT policy guidance is outlined in Chapter 6. A link to all QMS Job Aids is already provided on the main QRT SharePoint site.

1. To start the right tone for mentoring, shouldn’t we start in the error narrative? Otherwise, the employee may view the error narrative as negative feedback only.

Answer:

The error narrative is a fact based review of the transaction pulled for IPR or IQR. By using language that focuses on the statement of the error, the relevant evidence, and the supporting reference only; there is no feedback which can be misconstrued in a negative manner. Of course, we recognize that any notice of error is apt to be received with some degree of negativity. However, this potential negativity is minimized by removing all but the facts surrounding the case review.

The manner in which you approach a meeting to discuss the error will further alleviate negative connotations if you employ those mentoring suggestions regarding setting a time to discuss the error with the needs of the employee in mind. Allow flexibility to meet their current schedule, provide them with the relevant case information so they can further review the claim and be prepared to discuss the case with you, and allow them to submit any questions ahead of time to allow you time to prepare answers.

Once you are actually meeting, be sure to continue a focus the discussion on the facts and circumstances of this particular transaction review. Use LYNC functionality to share your screen and review relevant documents together so you can provide that visual element to the mentoring session. This approach should help foster a collaborative environment where the employee feels supported and encouraged by the QRS rather than as a one way lecture.

1. Should there be a requirement for Mentor Training if you have not officially mentored anyone?

Answer: Mentor training is provided in the QRS Challenge program. Those materials may be shared to provide supporting information to a QRS that has not yet attended a Challenge session. Training is certainly encouraged, but it is not specifically required. There is no specific training that can fully address the skills needed for mentoring. The nature of mentoring requires experience to improve your skills. Based upon local bargaining agreements and willing employees, one approach may be to allow a shadowing program. This approach would allow an inexperienced mentor to sit in and observe a more experienced QRS conduct a mentoring session. After a session or two spent as an observer, the roles could be changed so the experienced mentor observes and provides feedback as the new mentor conducts a meeting.

1. How do you determine when it is appropriate to end a mentoring session if it is not productive?

Answer: It will take experience to determine if and when it is appropriate to end a session. You should attempt to redirect the discussions to the facts and circumstances of the review when the meeting starts to move away from the intended topics. There can be some allowances for the employee to voice frustrations. Sometimes, letting them have that moment to vent is sufficient to then refocus on the issues at hand.

However, if at any time, you feel threatened or it becomes obvious that you are unable to turn the discussion back to the facts and circumstances of the review, then it would be appropriate to wrap up the meeting. Be sure to continue to take a neutral point of view when ending the meeting. Don’t end abruptly with a comment to the effect that you just can’t continue because of the employee’s behavior. You might indicate instead that it might be beneficial to break for a while and either continue a discussion later or to be available to answer any additional questions via email.

1. Mentoring via email or lync will be difficult and limited. Won’t this defeat the purpose of mentoring?

Answer: Mentoring is ideally done in a face to face meeting. However, as the VA workplace has shifted to a work at home environment and quality reviews are now assigned on a district basis, the QRT has to adopt strategies to maximize the benefit of mentoring. Email is the least ideal means of communication as so much is lost within the context of a written document. Phone calls are better because you can adopt a conversational tone and it allows for a more immediate response by both parties. LYNC functionality can be an acceptable alternative to a face to face meeting. LYNC does have video functionality, but it is rarely used and it is not generally part of a remote mentoring session. Although you cannot read facial expressions, you can use audio to capture tone and inflection to help you determine if your training is effective. Additionally, you can utilize LYNC functionality to view documents together and sort through the relevant evidence associated with the transaction review, as well as the reference materials.

Although mentoring is being made somewhat more difficult in a remote workforce, it is still a very important part of the quality review process. As such, the QRS needs to really focus on mentoring techniques that can be adapted to this reality.

1. Should we mentor only on the quality reviews which the employee has disagreed with the cited error?

Answer: The purpose of the mentoring is not just to convince an employee that the error is valid. Mentoring is intended to provide training to ensure that the error is not repeated. Thus, when mentoring, you are not just informing them of the error and the basis, but you are also to provide supporting training to indicate how they can avoid this same error in future case processing.

If you provide mentoring only when the employee disagrees with the error, you are missing out on providing a training moment to those employees that may agree with the error citation, but do not understand how to correct this specific error and avoid it in the future.

That being said, the following instruction for mentoring is provided in light of the change to the distribution of quality reviews across Districts.

Mentoring should continue to be provided on all cited IPR errors. The QRS should reach out to the employee reviewed at the time the IPR is complete. Remember that mentoring should be completed as soon as possible so that timeliness requirements for corrections can be met.

IQR errors will be handled slightly different. If the employee reviewed would like to discuss an IQR error(s) with a QRS or it is required by local agreements, they will contact the QRS who completed the initial review directly. The employee’s Coach will provide the name of the original reviewer. The employee will send the QRS an email requesting a meeting to discuss the error within 2 business days of receiving notification of the error and courtesy copy their *c*oach and the QRT coach of their station. The QRS will respond to the employee with availability and add their coach to the email chain. QRS should schedule meetings to discuss errors as soon as possible to ensure the employee is able to meet established deadlines (i.e. error corrections, requests for reconsideration, etc.). The QRS will ensure all coaches remain on the email communication for awareness purposes.

1. After a mentoring session, how do we reverse the error citation if we agree that an error should be overturned?

If a discussion of the specifics of the transaction support that the error should be overturned, you should follow the procedure outlined in the QMS User guide for overturning an error on rebuttal. For record purposes, there should be a formal written explanation in QMS to support the overturn. However, the specifics of the rebuttal process are determined at the local level at this time. Remember that in order to overturn an error, there needs to be a determination that the cited error did not meet the required error standard of a CUE or violation of directive or policy. There should be specific National guidance to support the determination. Misclassification of an error is not a basis for overturn. Additionally, an error should not be overturned simply because that decision (rating or administrative) has had a second signature. The fact that two people signed the decision does not change that there was an error noted in the processing of that particular transaction.

1. Is it acceptable to refer to specific VA documents when citing relevant evidence, such as “rating decision dated xx/xx/xx” or “686C received on xx/xx/xx.”

Answer: Generally, yes, it is acceptable and encouraged to be specific about relevant pieces of evidence. This is especially true when there are multiple documents of the same type that may be associated with the specific transaction under review. Providing specific dates of documents will reduce confusion and allow for faster review of the evidence that supports a finding of an error.