

Educational Overview: Unauthorized Access (“Snooping”) of VA Medical Records

Purpose of This Document

This educational document is intended to explain what medical-record “snooping” is within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), why it is a serious violation, what is publicly known about employees disciplined for such conduct, and what rights veterans have when concerns arise. It is written to inform, not to accuse, and to support transparency, accuracy, and trust in veterans’ healthcare systems.

What Is “Snooping”?

Within the VA, “snooping” refers to **accessing a veteran’s medical record without a legitimate job-related need**. This includes: - Viewing records out of curiosity - Accessing charts of veterans the employee is not treating or supporting - Reviewing sensitive mental health, substance use, or trauma-related notes without authorization - Accessing records of acquaintances, public figures, or individuals involved in disputes

Every access to a VA medical record is logged and auditable. Intent is irrelevant; unauthorized access alone constitutes a violation.

Why Snooping Is a Serious Federal Violation

VA medical records are protected by multiple layers of federal law and regulation, including: - The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) - The Privacy Act of 1974 - 38 U.S.C. § 7332, which provides heightened protection for certain categories of medical information

Violations can result in disciplinary action up to and including: - Termination of employment - Loss of federal service eligibility - Civil penalties - Criminal charges in severe or willful cases

What Is Publicly Known About VA Employees Who Snooped

The VA does **not publish an annual public tally** of employees fired specifically for snooping. Personnel actions are generally protected as private employment matters. However, several points are well established through public reporting and official statements:

- The VA routinely investigates unauthorized access incidents.

- Employees have been disciplined and terminated for improper access to veteran medical records.
- In recent years, highly publicized incidents have confirmed that **multiple VA employees accessed medical records of individuals without authorization**, triggering internal investigations and disciplinary proceedings.
- While the VA has acknowledged such incidents, it has **not consistently released the final employment outcome for every individual involved**, citing personnel privacy rules.

The absence of a consolidated public number does not indicate a lack of enforcement; rather, it reflects how federal employment discipline is reported.

How the VA Detects Snooping

The VA employs multiple safeguards, including:

- Automated electronic audit logs that record every record access
- Alerts for access to sensitive or restricted records
- Random and complaint-driven audits
- Oversight by facility Privacy Officers and the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG)

Veteran complaints alone are sufficient to trigger a formal review.

Why This Matters to Veterans

Medical record inaccuracies or unauthorized access can have far-reaching consequences, including:

- Reputational harm
- Professional or licensing impacts
- Improper clinical decision-making
- Erosion of trust in the healthcare system

For veterans with sensitive documentation—such as mental health treatment, military sexual trauma, or substance use histories—the stakes are particularly high.

Veterans' Rights

Veterans have the right to:

- Request an **audit or access log** showing who viewed their medical record
- Request corrections to inaccurate medical documentation
- File a privacy complaint with a VA Privacy Officer
- File a complaint with the VA Office of Inspector General
- Receive care without retaliation for raising privacy concerns

Concern does not equal accusation. Veterans are entitled to ask for review when patterns or irregularities appear.

Closing Perspective

The integrity of VA medical records depends on accuracy, confidentiality, and accountability. While the VA serves millions of veterans honorably, no system is immune from error or misconduct. Education, oversight, and transparency are essential to protecting veterans' rights and maintaining public trust.

This document is provided in the interest of education, accountability, and the protection of veterans as a whole.

— D. Cowdrey

I found in my records many incorrect medical errors, including substance abuse disorders such as opiates, alcohol and smoking, I was also listed as having Hodgkin's Lymphoma, none of which pertained to my record or my medical history and were entered in error. I did speak to my physician and it was acknowledged that these are not listed, or not seen as active, however I could still see these in my paperwork and reports.

When I spoke to the DAV they stated that I should ask my primary physician for the records correction, but not to reopen a case as it may change my rating. I believe that these errors have been made in the last five years or so.

I also recognized that contractors were using private emails during treatments, which is a HIPAA violation. The VA is often audited financially, but would benefit from a privacy and communications compliance audit. Though mistakes are often simply mistakes, it is important that we do our best to safeguard our medical records.

It should be known that privacy violations or false reporting is unacceptable, and I support strong measures which protect veterans and our records.

We are living in very politically hostile times. Medical trafficking is a real threat. High profile veterans may be targeted.

→ In 2024, news reports confirmed that **at least a dozen VA employees** improperly accessed the medical records of two high-profile individuals (vice presidential candidates JD **Vance** and Tim **Walz**) **without authorization**.

I will state plainly that I do not trust the political wavelength our country is currently on and feel that bad actors may pose a risk to veterans. → Armor up! <3