

ARMOR UP: Veterans' Guide to Accurate Medical Records

A practical, respectful guide for veterans who want their medical records to be truthful, current, and protective of their future.

Purpose

This document is written **by a veteran, for veterans**, to encourage careful stewardship of our medical records. As veteran deaths increase nationwide and records are relied upon for care decisions, benefits, investigations, and legacy documentation, **accuracy matters**.

This guide is also written with **deep gratitude and respect** for VA clinicians, nurses, physicians, support staff, and administrators, many of whom are veterans themselves, who work tirelessly to care for a unique and deserving population from the end of our military careers through late-term care.

We also regard that veterans have both the **right and responsibility** to ensure their records are *straight as an arrow*.

Why Record Accuracy Is Critical

Medical records: - Guide **future clinical decisions** - Affect **benefits, pain management, and mental health care** - May be **shared across systems** or reviewed externally - Can be **subpoenaed** or relied upon in investigations - Become part of a veteran's **permanent historical record**

Even small errors—an incorrect checkbox, a carried-forward diagnosis, or outdated coding—can create confusion or harm.

Common Record Errors Veterans Encounter

Many veterans discover inaccuracies such as: - A serious diagnosis (e.g., **cancer, hodgkin's lymphoma**) listed without confirmation - **Opioid use disorder** or “in remission” entries that never applied - Repeated “**smoker**” designations despite never smoking - **Alcohol abuse disorder** listed without meeting criteria - Conditions marked **active** long after being ruled out

These errors often result from: - Administrative carryover - Problem list auto-population - Coding persistence (ICD) - Checkbox defaults - System-to-system transfers

They are usually **not malicious, or on purpose**, but they must be corrected.

Gratitude Where It Is Due

Many veterans, including the author, have had **excellent VA care experiences** and hold deep appreciation for VA teams.

VA professionals: - Serve a complex population - Build long-term relationships with patients - Carry heavy caseloads and emotional burdens - Uphold care from transition to end-of-life

These are heroes! :)

Correcting records is all about healthy and friendly collaboration.

The Reality of Records in a Complex World

Veterans live within broader systems that include: - Government oversight - Contracted entities - Administrative data sharing - Public records

In times of heightened political tension, misinformation, and institutional strain, **truthful documentation is protective armor**.

Records do not exist in a vacuum. They may intersect with: - Legal processes - Law enforcement reports - Administrative reviews - External contractors

A single inaccurate checkbox can outlive the moment it was entered.

ARMOR UP: How Veterans Protect Their Records

1. Review Your Record Regularly

- Check your **Active Problem List**
- Review visit summaries
- Look for outdated or unexplained diagnoses

2. Reconcile, Don't Argue

Request a **problem list reconciliation**—this is standard medical language and keeps conversations professional.

3. Request Formal Chart Amendments

Ask that inaccuracies be: - **Removed**, or - Clearly marked “**entered in error**”

Explanatory notes alone are not enough if the diagnosis remains active.

4. Confirm Removal Everywhere

Ensure corrections apply to: - Problem lists - ICD coding - Administrative carryover - Flags or reminders

5. Document Once, Calmly

State facts clearly and briefly. Avoid emotional escalation. Accuracy speaks for itself.

6. Keep Your Own Copies

Maintain: - Secure messages - Amendment confirmations - Updated summaries

Your records belong to you.

The Human Impact of Inaccuracy

Being depicted as someone we are not: - Creates stress and distrust - Affects self-identity - Can alter how others treat us

Truth matters—not just clinically, but **personally**.

A Final Word to Veterans

This guide is about **self-advocacy with respect**.

You can: - Love your VA team - Trust your clinicians - Feel grateful for VA care

And still insist on accuracy.

We remain loyal to our team of caregivers and they to us. We are stewards of our nation and this is our shared armor.

Veterans served with honor. Our records should reflect the truth with the same integrity.