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THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

15 JAN 97

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** SURGEON GENERAL OF THE ARMY  
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY  
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE

**SUBJECT:** Policy for Specialty Care Timeliness

We have had several recent inquiries about TRICARE standards for obtaining surgeries or other specialty care within the direct care system. The TRICARE access standards state enrollees must obtain a specialty referral within the time frame indicated by the Primary Care Manager, but no later than one month from the date of the request. If surgery or other treatment is then indicated, the surgery or treatment must be scheduled within the time frame indicated by the provider, but no later than one month from the specialty consultation, unless the enrollee waives his or her right to this access. This standard also applies to active duty members who are automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime.

We have been informed that some military treatment facilities have subcategorized certain surgeries or treatments as elective or not medically necessary and have determined that timeliness standards do not apply. Instead, they have established waiting lists for these selected types of care. It is Department policy to perform only medically necessary procedures; therefore, delineation of procedures intended to avoid meeting access or timeliness standards is not appropriate, and not in keeping with our TRICARE obligations, and is in violation of the letter and intent of departmental policy.

Our goal is to provide care within the time frames delineated in our policy statement. If we cannot meet those standards in the direct care system, we must provide the care through our TRICARE managed care support contractors to arrange for the care our beneficiaries require.

My point of contact for this matter is Major Kathleen Larkin who may be reached at (703) 695-3323.

*Edward D. Martin*  
Edward D. Martin, M.D.

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary

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