



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, U. S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
2050 WORTH ROAD
FORT SAM HOUSTON, TEXAS 78234-6000

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

MCHO-CL-C

OTSG/MEDCOM Policy Memo 09-034

04 JUN 2009

Expires 4 June 2011

MEMORANDUM FOR Commanders, MEDCOM Major Subordinate Commands

SUBJECT: Use of Army Knowledge Online (AKO) Email to Conduct Electronic Medical Consultation

1. References.

a. Public Law 104-191, The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), 21 Aug 96.

b. DoD Directive 6025.18, Privacy and Individually Identifiable Health Information in DoD Health Care Programs, 19 Dec 02.

c. AR 25-1, Army Knowledge Management and Information Technology Management, 15 Jul 05.

d. AR 40-66, Medical Records Administration and Health Care Documentation, 17 Jun 08.

e. AR 40-68, Clinical Quality Management, 28 Feb 04.

f. MEDCOM Regulation 25-1, Army Medical Department Information Management, 15 Jun 05.

g. Memorandum of Understanding, USA MEDCOM and NATO Allied Command Operations (ACO) regarding NATO use of USA MEDCOM AKO Teleconsultation System for Afghanistan, 13 Nov 08.

h. OTSG/MEDCOM Policy Memo 08-053, Use of Telehealth in AMEDD TDA Facilities, 18 Dec 08.

i. Poropatich, RK; De Treville, R; Lappan, C; Barrigan, C. "The U.S. Army Telemedicine Program: General Overview and Current Status in Southwest Asia". Telemed J E Health, 2006 Aug 12, (4): 396-408.

* This policy supersedes OTSG/MEDCOM Policy Memo 07-009, 28 March 2007, subject: Use of Army Knowledge on Line (AKO) Email in Support of Electronic Telehealth Medical Consultation by Deployed Providers.

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2. Purpose: To state the policy for the use of AKO email for medical consultation between deployed providers and medical specialists for use in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and in support of other military medical missions. Enclosure 1 contains instructions on how to establish a teleconsult service using AKO.

3. Proponent: The proponent for this policy is Health Policy and Services (HP&S) Directorate, Clinical Services Division, US Army Medical Command (MEDCOM).

4. Background.

a. Mature telehealth solutions do not exist in deployed settings. Therefore, special provisions have been made to utilize existing information technology capabilities to enable the exchange of information in support of remote medical care.

b. The AKO Teleconsultation Service was established in 2004 as a means to streamline medical communications between deployed providers and consultants. The AKO Service has received over 5,000 consults from 1,349 different healthcare providers from all branches of the US military. The Service is operated and funded by the MEDCOM.

c. The AKO portal and its email platform are being used as an interim solution to facilitate the exchange of information between providers for purposes of medical consultation in support of deployed forces.

d. AKO electronic medical consultation facilitates the rapid exchange of non-identifiable patient information between a deployed provider and a consultant for the purpose of seeking medical advice regarding a diagnosis, treatment plan, or the need for medical evacuation.

e. AKO Teleconsultation can minimize the need for medical transport within a combat zone or evacuation from Theater. Likewise, AKO Teleconsultation can facilitate continuity of care and care coordination in those cases where evacuations are necessary.

f. A standardized business process has been established for the service and is administered by a Consult Manager (CM) who also serves as the single point of contact for operational support and training.

g. Email systems are not encrypted from end-to-end in this workflow. While emails originate in an AKO email server in-Theater and are transmitted over the NIPRNET, they are ultimately forwarded across other networks to a variety of Microsoft Exchange email servers for distribution to the consultants. Therefore, special provisions are required to protect patient information.

h. No medical equipment is provided to support this service. As a general guideline,

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it is recommended that deployed providers use digital cameras capable of supporting (at a minimum) 3 Mega pixel resolution (although 6-8 Mega pixel is preferred). Cameras that operate on AA batteries (not Lithium-ion) tend to be easier to maintain in the field.

5. Policy.

a. The AKO Teleconsultation Service is to be used by deployed providers only. Non-deployed providers or patients may not use this service.

b. Deployed US military providers and other approved non-US military providers can send a consult to the AKO Teleconsultation Service by accessing AKO email through a web browser at <https://webmail.us.army.mil>. Each clinical service has its own unique email address. (Enclosure 3 contains a complete listing).

c. In compliance with HIPAA, consultation requests should not include protected health information (PHI) such as patient name, social security number, date of birth, medical record number, and other individually identifying information. Use of a patient's gender and age is permitted. Digital images must obscure the face or identifiable markings unless required for diagnosis.

d. Because PHI is not included in an AKO Teleconsultation, the deployed provider should create and maintain a method for re-identifying the information once a consultant has replied.

e. The content and outcomes of the email consultation should be documented and archived within the Theater electronic medical record, utilizing paper-record systems, or other alternative information systems in cases where the electronic health record is not available or does not permit the provider to fully document the encounter—both data and images.

f. Medical information generated from the email consultation will be a part of the medical record in the deployed medical unit rendering the service to the patient. Workload credit associated with the medical record documentation will belong to the consultant's facility providing the service. Methods for documenting and capturing the consultant's workload for this service will be managed by the local military treatment facility.

g. Standard credentialing and privileging requirements for telehealth in garrison do not apply when the facility receiving the Teleconsultation service is located in a Theater of Operations.

h. Given the unique conditions in the deployed setting, a provider is not required to obtain written informed consent from the patient to conduct a Teleconsultation. However, it is recommended that the following types of information be relayed to the patient about the process of the Teleconsultation service:

- (1) That details of the medical history and current condition will be shared with other military healthcare providers in order to facilitate the email Teleconsultation service.

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(2) That no PHI will be recorded in the email consultation.

(3) That records resulting from the consultation will become part of the patient's military medical record and will be protected as required by HIPAA.

i. At all times, the deployed provider maintains ownership of the patient and is responsible for the delivery and documentation of care.

j. Quality assurance is paramount in the operation of this service. To facilitate oversight, the content of each consult will be captured, recorded, and key metrics published in the form of a monthly report to Clinical Consultants and other senior medical leaders. Key performance metrics include: (1) number and type of users, (2) number of consults requested, (3) Consultant response time, and (4) the number of medical evacuations avoided or facilitated.

k. Clinical case studies will be collected and used for continuing medical education purposes.

6. Responsibilities.

a. The AKO Teleconsultation Service is operated in partnership with a variety of stakeholders. Along with those that use, manage, and maintain the service there are those that play an important supporting role. Given the complexity of the Service, responsibilities are briefly outlined below.

b. Primary Users.

(1) Division Surgeons, Task Force Medical Leaders, and Medical Commanders will:

(a) Keep deployed providers aware of the availability of the AKO Teleconsultation Service and the rules of engagement.

(2) Deployed Providers will:

(a) Follow instructions for preparing consultation requests.

(b) Review the Consultant(s) feedback.

(c) Document the content and outcome of the consultation in the patient's medical record, in AHLTA-T where available.

(d) Adhere to local policies regarding the protection and storage of PHI.

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(3) The Surgeon General's Medical Consultants will:

(b) Follow instructions for requesting or setting up a new AKO consult service. (Enclosure 1 contains guidelines for setting up a new Teleconsultation service).

(c) Ensure the scheduling and availability of medical staff to answer consults.

(d) Evaluate the quality of their services.

(4) AKO Consultants will:

(a) Review and respond to consult requests in a timely fashion.

(b) Solicit advice from other medical specialties as required.

(c) Notify the CM to review or answer consults in the event of difficulties accessing email.

(5) AKO CM (Enclosure 2 contains a detailed job description).

(a) Oversee daily operation of the service in support of Medical Consultants.

(b) Monitor consult activity for quality and timeliness.

(c) Collect, record, and store all consult data.

(d) Serve as a liaison between providers throughout the consult process.

(e) Generate reports.

(f) Train and educate deploying medical providers.

c. Supporting organizations.

(1) Chief Consultant to The Surgeon General, Clinical Services Division, HP&S MEDCOM, will review and approve the addition of new consultancy services and preside over the policy.

(2) Medical Informatics Consultant will assist OTSG Medical Consultants in determining Theater requirements, facilitating the utilization of services, and providing briefings to senior leaders.

(3) MEDCOM Information Management will monitor the AKO portal and email for performance and maintenance issues.

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(4) AKO Program Office located at Fort Belvoir, VA will manage the approval of AKO utility accounts and maintain the AKO Portal.

7. General Procedures.

a. To initiate a request for consultation, deployed providers should compose a text narrative which includes: non-identifying demographic information about the patient (sex, age, occupation, etc.), a past medical history along with nature of present illness/injury, and physical exam information included in the body of the email. Digital images may be attached but are not required to initiate a consultation. Due to bandwidth constraints, provide no more than 3-5 images at a low to medium resolution and attach to the email.

b. The deployed provider should indicate his or her unclassified location and/or country location (Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.) in the consult request. This enables the Consultant to determine if regional medical assets may be available for local assistance. The CM also uses these data to describe the distribution and utilization of the service in monthly reports.

c. The deployed provider should choose a consult service to route the consult request. For each consultancy service, the primary responder will be the designated "AKO Consultant On-Call". (Enclosure 3 contains a complete list of participating specialties and corresponding email addresses for each service).

d. A response will be generated by the Consultant On-Call within 24 hours of receipt; however, response times average 5 hours or less for most services.

8. The point of contact for this policy is LTC Hon Pak, OTSG Medical Informatics Consultant, commercial 703-681-3090 or email Hon.Pak@amedd.army.mil.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Encls


HERBERT A. COLEY
Chief of Staff

Establishing an Army Knowledge Online (AKO) Consultancy Service

1. Purpose: To establish the protocol by which an Army Medical Corps medical specialty sets up an AKO consultancy service.
2. Process:
 - a. The Medical Specialty Consultant develops a formal request to develop a new AKO Consultancy Service. The request should be made in the form of an information paper describing the need for a new AKO Teleconsultation Service in a given specialty. The paper includes information on how the service will be managed and any unique requirements. The request will designate a clinical champion as the single point of contact who will be responsible for conduct and management of the service. The paper is sent to the AKO Teleconsultation Consult Manager (CM) for staffing.
 - b. The CM reviews the request and staffs the information paper with the Medical Informatics Consultant who oversees the operation of the service on behalf of the US Army Medical Command (MEDCOM).
 - c. Once approved by the Medical Informatics Consultant, the CM forwards the request to the Chief, Clinical Services Division (CSD), Health Policy and Services Directorate, MEDCOM, for consideration.
 - d. Once a new specialty service is approved, the CM assigns the service an AKO email name and applies for an AKO utility account. The naming convention is all or part of the name of the specialty with the standard root of us.army.mil (i.e., derm.consult@us.army.mil).
 - e. The CM coordinates with the Specialty Group Clinical Champion and MEDCOM Information Management Directorate to build and populate the specialty group in the AKO email system. A contact group must also be established in the MEDCOM exchange system. The "contact group" will be the names of all providers serving on the consult service.
 - f. Testing of the new consultancy service is facilitated by the CM. When two test consults are received by all "group members" with 100% accuracy, the new contact group is sent to the Medical Informatics Consultant.
 - g. Once all testing is complete, the CM notifies the Chief of CSD who then notifies senior medical officers through a formal announcement. In addition, the CM sends a broadcast message using AKO to all members of the Medical Corps, Army Nurse Corps, and 65D personnel.
 - h. The CM maintains all utility accounts.
 - i. The CM provides education and training on use of the AKO Teleconsultation Service for deploying medical providers.

Responsibilities of the Army Knowledge Online (AKO) Teleconsultation Consult Manager (CM)

The AKO CM serves as the single point of contact for operation of the Teleconsultation Service and principal liaison between deployed providers and consultants. The CM is located at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX. Teleconsultations are monitored every day of the week.

The CM has extensive knowledge and experience working for the US Army Medical Department and understands the deployed medical capabilities of each Service throughout the combat zone. Along with project management skills, the CM is familiar with medical terminology and principles of digital photography and maintains broad technical skills for assistance in troubleshooting a variety of technical problems.

As liaison, the CM maintains a close relationship with deployed providers and consultants. The CM sends an introductory email to new users upon receipt of their first Teleconsultation request and continues to serve as an advocate on their behalf throughout the entire Teleconsultation process.

Because the CM is a team member of each consultancy group and has visibility of all incoming consults, the CM is in the position to facilitate collaborations between specialties-- even when not initially requested by the deployed provider or consultant. Examples include cases whereby multi-specialty collaboration between dermatology, infectious disease, and toxicology might be helpful.

The CM maintains a copy of all Teleconsultation encounters. The CM routinely compiles and aggregates data and images from the body of the email consult into a database or other program where it is indexed by specialty. The data is easy to retrieve in the event it is required to help support a follow-up consultation or required for data-mining to prepare reports. Records are compliant with the Privacy Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

The CM prepares monthly, annual, and adhoc reports on utilization of the program for the Medical Informatics Consultant and for participating Consultancy Groups.

Army Knowledge Online (AKO) Teleconsultation Services

Deployed providers may request consults from the specialties listed below. The list of consultancy services is continuously updated and posted on AKO Medical Knowledge Network home page. If the appropriate clinical specialty is not available, send the consult to help.consult@amedd.army.mil. The Consult Manager (CM) will make arrangements for a Teleconsultation with the medical specialty you request.

For participating NATO forces in Afghanistan, consults should be addressed to a single email address at med.consult@us.army.mil. The CM will route to the specialty requested and facilitate the consultation process.

Directory of AKO Consultancy Services:

1. burntrauma.consult@us.army.mil (Burn-trauma)
2. cards.consult@us.army.mil (Cardiology)
3. derm.consult@us.army.mil (Dermatology)
4. eye.consult@us.army.mil (Ophthalmology and Optometry)
5. id.consult@us.army.mil (Infectious Diseases)
6. infect.cntrl.consult@us.army.mil (Infection Control)
7. im.consult@us.army.mil (Internal Medicine)
8. med.consult@us.army.mil (Afghanistan NATO Program only)
9. microbiology.consult@us.army.mil (Laboratory Services)
10. nephrology.consult@us.army.mil (Nephrology)
11. neuron.consult@us.army.mil (Neurology)
12. ortho.consult@us.army.mil (Orthopedics and Podiatry)
13. picu.consult@us.army.mil (Pediatrics Intensive Care)
14. pmom.consult@us.army.mil (Preventive Medicine)
15. rheum.consult@us.army.mil (Rheumatology)
16. sleep.e.consult@us.army.mil (Sleep apnea)
17. tbi.consult@us.army.mil (Traumatic Brain Injury)
18. toxicology.consult@us.army.mil (Toxicology)
19. urology.consult@us.army.mil (Urology)
20. dental.consult@us.army.mil (General dental questions)
21. endodontic.consult@us.army.mil (Endodontic or root canal issues)
22. oralpath.consult@us.army.mil (Pathology in or around oral cavity)
23. oralsurgery.consult@us.army.mil (Removing teeth, infections or fractures involving the jaw)
24. pedodontic.consult@us.army.mil (Dental questions involving children)
25. perio.consult@us.army.mil (Periodontal conditions or questions involving the gums)
26. protho.consult@us.army.mil (Implants, crowns, partial dentures, or complete dentures)