

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



**Standard Operating Procedures**

**Policy Name:** Medical Autonomy

**Policy Number:** 507.01.02

**Effective Date:** 1/19/2022

**Page Number:** 1 of 3

**Authority:**  
Commissioner

**Originating Division:**  
Health Services Division  
(Physical Health)

**Access Listing:**  
Level I: All Access

**I. Introduction and Summary:**

All clinical decisions and actions regarding health care services provided to offenders are the sole responsibility of the Responsible Health Authority in each facility and shall not be compromised for security reasons. This procedure is applicable to all facilities that house Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) offenders to include private and county prisons.

**II. Authority:**

- A. Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. 125-4-4.04;
- B. GDC Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): 507.01.04 Responsible Health Authority;
- C. NCCHC 2018 Adult Standard: P-A-03; and
- D. ACA Standards: 5-ACI-6B-02 (ref. 4-4381, Mandatory) and 4-ALDF-4D-02.

**III. Definitions:**

- A. **Responsible Health Authority** - An individual who may or may not be a physician who is designated to ensure the provision of appropriate health care for offenders. When this authority is other than a physician, medical judgments rest with a designated licensed Responsible Physician.
- B. **Outside Services** - Services provided outside a Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) facility either ordered or approved by a licensed physician.
- C. **Responsible Physician** - Designated MD or DO Physician who assumes medical responsibility in the absence of the Medical Director.
- D. **Qualified Health Care Professional (QHP)** - Includes physicians, physician assistants, nurses, nurse practitioners, dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, medical assistants, certified nursing assistants, mental health professionals, and

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others who by virtue of education, credentials, and experience are permitted by law to evaluate and care for patients.

**IV. Statement of Policy and Applicable Procedures:**

- A. The GDC Office of Health Services and/or contract vendor is responsible for the provision and oversight of health care to offenders housed in all GDC facilities.
- B. All decisions related to the delivery of, access to, or the quality of health care services are made by Qualified Health Care Professionals (QHPs) in concurrence with the Responsible Health Authority. If the Responsible Health Authority is someone other than a physician, medical judgements, and medical decisions, as described above, rest with the designated licensed Responsible Physician.
- C. All health care providers at each facility are expected to understand and comply with all security regulations.
- D. Decisions on the type of treatment and the need for transfer to Outside Services are the sole province of physicians, dentists, and mid-level providers. The Responsible Health Authority and Responsible Physician communicate, and coordinate health care delivery needs to ensure health care is not compromised.
- E. The Responsible Health Authority or designee will work in conjunction with the facility authority in cases where security concerns and medical management of the offender are in conflict.
- F. The Responsible Health Authority, with cooperation of the facility authority, will ensure that security considerations do not compromise decisions and actions regarding necessary health care for any offender. In addition, the Responsible Health Authority can expect administrative support to ensure the availability of necessary health services for all offenders.
- G. At the institutional or facility level, the Responsible Health Authority and the unit warden/superintendent or designee will address any policies or practices that deny direct medical orders. This includes all policies or practices that interfere with the

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delivery of, the access to, or the quality of health care services deemed necessary by the Responsible Health Authority.

H. If conflicts cannot be resolved at the local level, the Responsible Health Authority will immediately notify the contract vendor statewide medical director, who will notify the GDC Statewide Medical Director or Assistant Commissioner for Health Services, who will work in concert with the Facilities Division to bring about the most appropriate resolution.

I. In those extraordinary circumstances in which there are conflicting directives from health services providers, the GDC Statewide Medical Director has the authority to amend or invalidate the conflicting directives.

V. **Attachments:** None.

VI. **Record Retention of Forms Relevant to this Policy:** None.