

**STATEMENT OF
CAROLYN CLANCY, MD
ACTING DEPUTY SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION
HEARING ON
"STRATEGIC REVIEW: EVALUATING CONCERNS ABOUT THE ONGOING
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION
PROGRAM"**

APRIL 14, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Mrvan, Ranking Member Rosendale and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) initiative to modernize our electronic health record (EHR) through the acquisition and deployment of the Cerner Millennium solution. This effort is one of the most complex and transformational enterprise-wide endeavors in the Department's history and exemplifies the Department's intention to lead the future of U.S. health care on behalf of Veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors. I am accompanied today by Mr. John H. Windom, Executive Director, Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization (OEHRM); Dr. Laura Kroupa, Chief Medical Officer, OEHRM; Mr. John Short, Chief Technology and Integration Officer, OEHRM; Dr. Kameron L. Matthews, Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services; and, Dr. Robert J. Fischer, Director, Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center (VAMC).

I want to first extend my gratitude to Congress and this Subcommittee for your shared commitment to our Nation's Veterans. The authorities and resources you have provided VA, the Nation's largest integrated health system, to implement a joint record with the Department of Defense and care for Servicemembers and Veterans across the care continuum represents a quantum leap forward in American medicine. VA has long been a leader in caring for the whole person and understanding not just Veterans' medical needs, but the impacts of environment, geography, social support, and academic and professional pursuits on Veterans' ability to achieve their life and health goals. In today's health care ecosystem, technology powers transformation, and with an integrated record, VA has the opportunity to act as a unified enterprise to cultivate the health and well-being of individual Veterans and the U.S. Veteran population. We intend to realize the full promise of a modernized, integrated electronic health record.

Mann-Grandstaff VAMC

Since VA's last appearance on EHR modernization before this Subcommittee in September 2020, the Department has launched the Cerner Millennium record at the Mann Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, Washington. Other Federal and private sector health care systems know that any EHR implementation is an extremely

complex endeavor and executing this feat amidst a pandemic is uncharted territory. We are deeply proud of the dedicated leaders and employees in Mann-Grandstaff who diligently led the way forward on this transformation effort even amidst the unprecedented demands of COVID-19.

Go-live for the new Cerner Millennium solution occurred on October 24, 2020, at the initial operating capability (IOC) sites in the Pacific Northwest, including the Mann-Grandstaff VAMC, its four associated facilities, and the West Consolidated Patient Account Center. This was the culmination of more than 2 years of work by 18 EHR Councils and frontline employees to make more than 1,300 design decisions and create over 850 workflows representing VA's vast array of clinical and business operations areas.

Since go-live, leaders and frontline employees in Mann-Grandstaff have yet again exemplified the mission-driven ethos of VA, demonstrating commitment, advocacy, and excellence in their efforts to methodically identify opportunities for optimization of the EHR. As a High Reliability and Learning Organization, we have listened intently to their experience and to the feedback of the Veterans they serve and have proactively reviewed key system metrics; this has enabled us to identify aspects of implementation that require focused optimization. For example:

- Productivity is expected to decrease with any workflow modernization, but Primary Care and other key operational areas have struggled to surpass 50-60% of normal levels in the months following go-live. Careful review has illuminated opportunities to streamline workflows and further embrace VA's longstanding strength: interdisciplinary care.
- Change management is essential in any transformation of this scale, and everything from training to at-the-elbow support was complicated by the pandemic. Mann-Grandstaff employees have shown time and again that they embrace change and wish to lead the rest of the organization forward. Additional change management is needed; however, to translate the way they completed the essential elements of their roles in VistA to the way this is now done in the Cerner environment. This work is now underway.
- Veterans have reported concerns with the new patient portal with respect to medication refills. As this is an essential aspect of care, we are now conducting a robust human-centered design initiative to ensure our portal experience is a leader in the industry.

Additionally, several User Optimization Listening sessions with Mann-Grandstaff employees since go-live have identified specific end-user issues. Twenty 'tiger teams' comprised of members of the Electronic Health Record Modernization Counsel, Mann-Grandstaff end users, OEHRM program leads, VA solution experts, Veterans Integrated Service Network representatives, and Cerner staff recently completed a 6-week

optimization sprint. Operational areas the teams addressed included inpatient care, behavioral health, and referral management, and solutions included process changes, software configuration changes, and training enhancements.

Strategic Review

To ensure we are maximally responsive to Veteran and employee feedback on the new record in Mann-Grandstaff and to ensure the success of future deployments, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs announced a proactive, end-to-end strategic review of the electronic health record modernization program. This assessment period will not exceed 12 weeks. VA remains committed to the Cerner Millennium solution and the strategic review is aimed to strengthen our efforts. We are operating jointly across the enterprise to conduct this top-to-bottom review and accelerate our ability to implement a modern record that best serves Veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors.

Based on opportunities identified during the initial implementation, we will: (1) focus on areas for additional productivity and clinical workflow optimization at Mann-Grandstaff and upcoming implementation sites; (2) complete a human-centered design effort to make Veteran-centered improvements to the patient portal; (3) create a 'sandbox' environment to allow employees at future implementation sites to conduct interdisciplinary, team-based rehearsals of their workflows in the new EHR solution; (4) evaluate data syndication efforts; and (5) execute revenue cycle improvements. We are also strengthening governance of decision-making and the spend plan for the project. Each workstream has joint representation from program offices across VA and is engaged in a deep effort to listen to stakeholders and Veterans, as well as to measure the progress and impact of their efforts. Importantly, a key measure of the success of the review and subsequent actions will be feedback from Veterans and the employees in Mann-Grandstaff. We intend to build such confidence in the current implementation and way forward that employees feel proud to be ambassadors for this effort to Veterans and to their colleagues across the system.

Since the strategic review commenced on March 24, 2021, our teams have also conducted a deep-dive analysis of all initial Cerner contract deliverables and key performance metrics. Going forward, we are changing our focus from schedule-driven to event-driven management and are implementing Earned Value Management to better evaluate the program's efficiency. This will add additional program management controls to enable us to predictively identify potential issues and proactively implement solutions, thus minimizing risks to the project. Additionally, we are improving our test protocols and honing our Key Performance Indicators to better define success with enterprise wide stakeholder acceptance and ownership.

The key steps remaining in this analysis are to review and validate our program schedule, which includes the deployment plan, and to conduct the requisite 3-year assessment of organizational structure; the latter was set when the project was initiated. Our intention is that, once complete, the entire enterprise and contractors will have

agreement and better understanding of the cost, schedule, and performance requirements, and that these will be stable for the life of the program.

Infrastructure Readiness

As the strategic review proceeds and the deployment schedule is re-evaluated, VA is proactively planning for required physical and IT infrastructure upgrades. The EHR transformation has further illuminated the challenges of VA's aging infrastructure, with traditional designs not easily able to support the technical enhancements needed to implement a modern record and ancillary systems. VA had improved the network and system performance at VA Medical Centers in Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 20 and VISN 10 by increasing network bandwidth and upgrading aging infrastructure where current state does not meet the new EHR specifications and requirements and would otherwise negatively affect system performance for Veterans and their care providers.

Program Funding

For Fiscal Year 2021, VA received its full appropriation request of \$2.627 billion for the EHRM program. This funding supports the full EHR solution implementation to sites in VISN 20 and VISN 10 and the preparation of EHR deployments in future years, including the necessary infrastructure upgrades at VA medical facilities 6-18 months in advance of go-live at each site. Continuity of funding is integral to our ability to execute the schedule as planned and move work for planned waves into future budget years.

Closing

I once again thank Congress, and specifically this Subcommittee, for your continued support and shared commitment to our success. Because of your support, VA is now able to make a significant leap forward in our mission of serving the Nation's Veterans with excellence.

We will continue to keep Congress informed as the strategic review progresses. True to mission, VA intends not only to get this right, but to lead the way in U.S. health care. We will take the time to listen thoroughly to the experiences of Veterans and employees with our new system before we expand implementation to other areas of the Nation. It will be time well spent, and it reflects the trust and excellence America's Veterans expect from VA.

Chairman Mrvan, Ranking Member Rosendale, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today to discuss our deployment of the EHR solution. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.