

**STATEMENT OF
MAJ GEN (Ret.) PATRICK SARGENT, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER
CERNER GOVERNMENT SERVICES
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION
April 26, 2022**

Chairman Mrvan, Ranking Member Rosendale, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing and for your continued engagement and support of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) program.

I am honored to join Cerner and to lead this noble mission. I look forward to getting to know and working with each of you as we continue the journey on this transformative program. Over the course of my 35-years in the military, I had the privilege to lead some of the finest men and women, both in peacetime and at war.

From commanding the combat healthcare system during Operation Iraqi Freedom, to commanding the Regional Health Command-Pacific during DoD's initial go-live at Madigan Army Medical Center, I have fought my entire career to improve health outcomes for our men and women in uniform and our nation's Veterans.

I firmly believe we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fundamentally change healthcare for generations to come. That is why I am here, and with your support, that is what we will achieve. The stakes couldn't be higher.

Together with VA, Cerner and our small and Veteran-owned business partners continue to achieve historic milestones in VA and the Department of Defense's (DoD) decades-long journey to provide a lifetime of seamless care for Service members, Veterans, and their families. We owe it to them to get this right and we remain committed to delivering on our promise of world-class solutions that improve health outcomes and deliver clinical excellence.

Late last year, Secretary McDonough formally announced organizational and leadership changes for the electronic health record modernization program as well as an updated deployment schedule that set us on a trajectory toward additional go lives in 2022. Under the leadership of Dr. Terry Adirim, VA and Cerner have deepened and expanded our lines of communication and collaboration, ensuring unity in leadership and direction of the program.

In addition, Deputy Secretary Remy has been highly engaged, meeting with Cerner's president and CEO, Dr. David Feinberg, on a regular basis – demonstrating the commitment of senior leadership from both organizations to getting this right for our Veterans.

Last month, VA and Cerner delivered a successful go-live at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Walla Walla, Washington, and we look forward to

continuing that momentum with deployment to the VA Central Ohio Healthcare System in Columbus, Ohio. Carrying forward lessons learned from the Mann-Grandstaff VAMC, we worked closely with VA to make a final push prior to go-live to ensure that providers at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VAMC completed the necessary training on their primary roles. We recognize there is still work to do to improve training and this is something we continue to iterate with VA.

Improving the delivery of care and the overall experience for the Veteran is core to this mission. There were several immediate achievements realized during the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VAMC go-live. From day one, providers and staff showed proficiency using the system, and a few days into go-live, requested that the Cerner training staff step back, knowing that the support was ready if needed. We also saw a healthy number of Veterans who signed up for and used their new patient portal to exchange messages with their healthcare team and request prescription refills.

While we are focused on continued successful go-lives in 2022, we also remain engaged with VA providers and staff at the Mann-Grandstaff and Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VAMCs. Our on-site support teams are committed to gathering real-time feedback and identifying opportunities for improvement. To date, we have implemented over 3,300 change requests, including simplifying workflow design and alerts, training, as well as making enhancements to the patient portal.

From the beginning, our steadfast approach has been based on two things: What is best for the Veteran, and what is best for VA providers. I cannot underscore enough that the key to standardized systems, workflows, data, and most importantly continuity of care for Veterans, requires us to configure our solutions not customize them.

VistA has been highly customized over time and is the source of many of the issues Veterans and providers experience today. Bringing standardization across an innovative health system as complex as VA is no easy task. Change requires effort and commitment, and VA providers and Veterans deserve the simplified clinical workflows and enhanced patient experience this program will deliver.

To help VA streamline and make informed system configuration decisions, we must have more data, feedback, and input from multiple VA facilities – each with unique services and approaches to delivering care. As we continue additional deployments, the data gleaned from these sites will provide evidence as to which change requests are positively impacting VA providers and patients across the enterprise.

This health record modernization is as much about leadership and change management as it is about IT. Standardizing processes across the enterprise will align VA with commercial best practices and will also improve the Veteran experience, especially for those Veterans who routinely receive care in more than one VA facility, military hospitals or clinics, or even community care partners.

Since going live with VA and DoD's joint health information exchange (HIE) in April 2020, a tool that allows VA, DoD, and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) to exchange data with community partners, we've expanded the joint HIE to include the CommonWell health Alliance. Today, the joint HIE connects VA, DoD and the USCG with approximately 65 percent of community care providers. Later this year, we hope to increase that number to 99 percent with the addition of CareQuality to the joint HIE.

Patient safety is a shared priority among VA, this committee, and Cerner. We continue to see positive results with solutions that have a significant impact on patient safety, such as barcode medication administration, prescription drug monitoring, as well as the opioid advisor.

In 2021, we went live with the prescription drug monitoring solution at Mann-Grandstaff. The solution pulls data from 46 connected states. It allows providers to see which controlled substances were dispensed to a Veteran prior to providing a prescription for another controlled substance. The daily use of the prescription drug monitoring solution continues to increase, with feedback from providers stating the tool gives them the necessary data to make the best possible care decisions.

Through the opioid advisor, nearly 1,000 opioid prescriptions have been modified based on Cerner EHR alerts. These alerts resulted in alternative treatments for those at higher risk of opioid use disorders. Coupled with the prescription drug monitoring solution, the opioid advisor is a force multiplier, ensuring providers have the necessary data when prescribing medications.

Barcode medication administration is a workflow that allows providers to validate that the correct medications are given to each patient. Providers at Mann-Grandstaff are demonstrating a compliance rate of more than 90 percent, indicating that they are almost always scanning wristbands and containers when they prescribe medications to Veterans. This critical capability was not previously available to VA.

Providers are also spending less time using the EHR and more time with Veterans. Currently, providers are averaging under 33 minutes and nurses averaging under seven minutes documenting in the EHR. Both are improvements from baseline and indicates a more effective ability to move Veterans through their clinic or hospital visits.

The patient portal is another area where we continue to trend upward. Over 30,000 Veterans signed up for My VA Health. We've seen nearly 77,000 veteran-initiated messages, approximately 66,500 provider messages to Veterans, and over 142,000 medication refills requested through the portal. While this is a healthy adoption, Veteran experience within the patient portal is a top priority for Cerner and we continue to work with VA to improve that patient experience and ensure Veterans have the necessary information they need to successfully utilize the breadth of patient portal functionality.

These examples are a snapshot of the value Veterans and providers are experiencing. With additional go lives, providers and Veterans at those locations will benefit from the same value, ultimately enhancing the overall are experience.

Cerner takes our responsibly to Veterans, the taxpayer, and our congressional stakeholders seriously. We must never lose sight of why we are here, for the Veterans, Service Members, and their families. We owe them a debt that can never be repaid, and we are committed to doing what it takes to get this right.

Cerner is honored to partner with Congress and VA as we continue this important mission. With your ongoing support, we will continue to achieve our shared goal.

Thank you and I look forward to our discussion today.