

Testimony before the United States House of Representatives

Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health Hearing on "Iowa: A Leader in Veteran Healthcare Innovation"

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Statement of Brandon Blankenship, Chief Information Security Officer of ProCircular

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

Although I am the chief information security officer for ProCircular, a cybersecurity services firm based out of Iowa, I believe my value to this subcommittee can be best vocalized as a recipient of VA care. I am an Iraq war veteran, that led a squad of Marines in the Triangle of Death in 2004. Upon my return, in 2005 I experienced some of the scheduling and administrative challenges navigating the VA.

In recent years I have seen firsthand the incredible benefits of using AI/ML within cybersecurity, not only to enhance accuracy and speed in detection models to identify threatening malware behaviors, but to automate research tasks.

As others will likely articulate, The VA has mountains of data at its disposal. This data can be used by doctors, nurses, and administrative staff to better serve veterans; however, the issue is that much of this data is either unstructured or difficult to query. Effectively this data is unavailable to the staff and doctors to use in any meaningful way or in any timely manner, simply because they are drowning in data. AI or machine learning algorithms are fantastic at pattern recognition and will continue to improve as the results of those patterns are used to train the model further.

Imagine how beneficial it would be for a doctor to have the top five recommended issues ready for review before seeing a patient, and those potential diagnosis and remediations would be based on decades of hard data and thousands of discrete data fields, rather than fallible human bias and individual best effort. The AI/ML could be seen as a genius intern that excels at processing large amounts of data and quickly and accurately making correlations, based on historical facts and individual patient history. These recommendations could be given to the doctor as a force multiplier, without cutting out expert human judgment. It would allow the doctors to make use of currently unusable data to make real-time fact-based decisions, and ultimately better serve veterans.

My personal experience with the VA centered on administrative problems. After returning from a war zone, I went to the VA to get my hearing checked within weeks. The visit took most of the day, and the only thing that was accomplished was to get into the system and have an opportunity to be scheduled for a hearing test. I wasn't allowed to negotiate the date for scheduling like a normal doctor's office. I later received a letter in the mail informing me that my hearing test appointment was the following day, which I was unable to attend because of a conflict. That was 19 years ago, and I've never been back. I fully acknowledge that I chose not to use the VA, because of my frustration with the scheduling process, however, multiply my experience times millions of veterans to understand the scope. If the scheduling process is frustrating and counterintuitive, effectively veterans are being denied care.

Because it's been two decades since I have experienced firefights and suicide car bombs with no hearing protection, it is unlikely I will be able to prove that my hearing loss is the result of military service. The issue isn't my personal journey, but rather acknowledging that AI, chatbots or scheduling personal assistants can be used to streamline and achieve efficiency gains for the Department of Veterans affairs. If we can do better cut down on cycle time and

defects in scheduling and navigating a complicated system, fewer veterans will self-select out of the care they need and deserve.

AI can be used for predictive analytics for resource allocation. By analyzing historical data, AI can predict demand for healthcare services, enabling the VA to allocate resources effectively and ensure timely access to care for veterans. It can also be used for faster diagnosis and treatment, and research and development; however, I believe that by simply improving the administrative process, we can provide an enhanced veteran experience.