

Hearing Date: November 19, 2003

Committee: HVAC

Member: Representative Buyer

Witness: Mr. Reardon

Question # 1

Question: I noted in your biography that you worked on the IT infrastructure that supports TRICARE. Was DoD able to assist all the Guard and Reservists family members with respect to their TRICARE benefits when their spouses were activated?

Answer: The Department of Defense has launched an extensive education and marketing effort targeted to inform beneficiaries, the Services, Lead Agent Offices, Managed Care Support Contractors, and the media about TRICARE benefits offered to Reserve Component Service members. Moreover, information is provided to beneficiaries during the pre-mobilization phase, during the mobilization itself, and upon demobilization. Also, in addition to current education and marketing efforts, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 establishes TRICARE Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinators (BCAC) for Reserve Component Beneficiaries. These BCACs will be assigned to each TRICARE region, with at least one person serving full-time as a BCAC, solely to answer questions and assist Reserve Component members.

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Question # 2

Question: In your opinion, why is it that the DD 214 form is not yet available in an electronic version?

Answer: The information on the DD Form 214 is taken from the hard copy or electronic personnel records and the information is manually entered onto the form. Services' current systems do not support an automatic populating capability. The form must be printed out to be signed (authenticated), and there is currently no way to electronically store or maintain the authenticated data. Additionally, since the DD Form 214 contains personal information that is covered by the Privacy Act, access must be carefully controlled. Resolving these and other technical problems and developing a system to do this would not be cost effective, especially in light of a new personnel and pay system which is to be fielded beginning in Fiscal Year 2005.

With this system, the Defense Integrated Military Human Resources System Personnel/Pay (DIMHRS (Pers/Pay)), the Department of Defense will have the capability to produce an electronic DD Form 214. DIMHRS (Pers/Pay) will be a totally integrated pay and personnel system supporting the operational requirements of all the DoD Components and will resolve the inefficiencies and deficiencies of our legacy personnel and pay systems. It will be the vehicle through which we transform military personnel and pay management.

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Question # 3

Question: What would you identify as the three greatest obstacles in developing a seamless VA/DoD electronic medical record?

Answer: We do not foresee any obstacles that will impede our progress toward achieving seamless VA/DoD electronic medical records. Various DoD/VA joint working groups have been put in place to manage all the different key areas such as technical, functional, architecture, information management/standards, project management, imaging, and information assurance/privacy. Updates on their efforts are provided on a monthly basis to the VA/DoD Health Executive Council's Information Management/Information Technology Work Group. As challenges arise, they are addressed with mitigating plans.

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Question # 4

Question: In your testimony you stated the Veterans Benefits Administration uses the Federal Health Information Exchange (FHIE) to process disability claims. Does FHIE capture the disabilities being claimed with VA by separating or retiring Service members?

Answer: No, the Title 38 disability claims process generally begins after a Service member's separation or retirement. The Federal Health Information Exchange (FHIE) provides DoD electronic health data for the period prior to a Service members' separation. However, FHIE may contain clinical results directly associated with a claim, such as laboratory results, radiology reports, consult reports, and other data elements. DoD data transferred through FHIE is available for use by authorized Veterans Benefits Administration personnel through the Compensation and Pension Record Interchange system.

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Question # 5

Question: What data elements of FHIE are used by the Veterans Benefits Administration to support a veteran's disability claim? Are these data elements used in lieu of the exam results from the separation/retirement physical? Or, does FHIE include the results from the Service member's entrance and separation or retirement physical examinations? If not, when will these be included in FHIE?

Answer: Federal Health Information Exchange (FHIE) data elements currently available for Veterans Benefits Administrator's use are demographic data, laboratory results, outpatient military facility pharmacy data, radiology results, allergy information, discharge summaries, consult reports, and admission, discharge and transfer information. Data elements from the separation physical, such as laboratory results and radiology reports, are also included in the information that is sent through FHIE. For Fiscal Year 2004, planned product improvements for FHIE will add DoD outpatient mail order pharmacy and retail network pharmacy data and elements of the Standard Ambulatory Data record such as the ICD-9 diagnosis code, primary care manager, treatment provider, clinical service, and appointment date/time.

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Question # 6

Question: Is FHIE consistent with the scope of VA's Benefit's Delivery at Discharge (BDD) process?

Answer: Benefit's Delivery at Discharge (BDD) enables VA representatives to process disability claims and to review proposed disability ratings with military personnel prior to their separation/retirement from active duty. Eleven major military facilities have a full-time BDD counselor. Since the BDD process is taking place before the Service members' separation, FHIE is not utilized in the process, rather VA providers nationwide and Veterans Benefits Administration personnel have access to the FHIE data which are being utilized in the delivery of health care and adjudication of disability claims. The paper medical record is being utilized in this process. The Federal Health Information Exchange (FHIE) program supports the transfer of electronic health information from DoD to VA at the point of the Service member's separation.

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Question # 7

Question: Is there an existing DoD/VA project team charged with developing the linkage among VA's BDD and DoD's FHIE and DIMHRS? If so, what is the timeline? If not, why not?

Answer: No, there is no project team charged with developing the linkage among VA's BDD and DoD's FHIE. Currently, the Federal Health Information Exchange (FHIE) program supports the transfer of electronic health information from DoD to VA at the point of the Service member's separation. Since the BDD process is taking place before the Service members' separation, FHIE is not utilized in the process. Appropriate VBA personnel are given access to view DoD clinical data in FHIE in support of disability claims processing for separated or retired Service members. To date, DoD has transmitted over 56 million messages to the FHIE data repository on 1.78 million unique retired or discharged Service members. This number is constantly growing as health information on recently separated and retired Service members is packaged and transferred to the VA. The information currently available to VA providers includes demographic data, laboratory results, outpatient military facility pharmacy data, radiology results, allergy information, discharge summaries, consult reports, and admission, discharge and transfer information. All information is sent using secure messaging to protect this information during the transfer process.

In regard to the DIMHRS interface with VA, under the direction of the Joint Executive Council, the Benefits Executive Council is developing interoperability plans for exchange of personnel information between the VA and DoD. The personnel information interface requirement between DIMHRS and the VA is fully documented (at the data element level) in the DIMHRS requirements that have now been provided to the DIMHRS developer. The technical solution for this interface will be determined by the DIMHRS developer in concert with the Joint Requirements and Integration Office and the VA systems staff. The interoperability plan is currently in draft at DoD and will be forwarded to VA by the end of the calendar year. In addition, the Deployment Health Working Group, under the guidance of the Health Executive Council, was briefed on December 8, 2003, on the interface between the Defense Personnel Records Image Retrieval System and the VA Personnel Information Exchange System to see if there are opportunities to extend this information exchange source to the Veterans Health Administration.