

Department of Veterans Affairs

VistA Fact Sheet



Winner of the
2006 Innovations in American Government Award

Presented by
**The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at
Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government**





Innovations in American Government Award Fact Sheet

The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government has named the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) one of seven 2006 winners of the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award for its health information system, the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA). VistA includes one of the most comprehensive and widely deployed electronic health records (EHR) in use today.

The award is presented to government agencies that exhibit innovation in the public sector and develop models that can be replicated in other industries. The Innovations committee specifically recognized VA for its leadership role in transforming health care in the United States by investment in a comprehensive EHR.

Introduction

As a result of a rigorous system of performance measurement and improvement supported by VA's electronic health record system, VistA, veterans treated by VA now receive "the best care anywhere." A recent RAND study found that VA outperforms all other sectors of American health care across the spectrum of 294 measures of quality and disease prevention and treatment. For six straight years, VA has led private-sector health care in the independent American Customer Satisfaction Index.

While the costs of healthcare in the United States continue to soar, VistA is reducing costs and errors and increasing safety and efficiency. The price of maintaining the system is \$87 per patient per year, less than the cost of one unnecessarily repeated lab test.

VistA enables VA clinicians to view electronic health records, including images, throughout VA's 1,400 site system. The foundation of a personal health records system helps veterans successfully manage their own health.

The involvement of front-line providers, use of performance measures and universal use of electronic health records have enabled VA to set the national benchmark in quality of care. VistA's computerized system enables key decisions by checking links to automated drug distribution, leading to a significant reduction in the error rate. As many as one in seven hospitalizations occur unnecessarily because records are not immediately available and as many as one in five lab tests is needlessly repeated. It also provides telehealth outreach to rural and isolated veterans.

VistA is innovative because of its unique linkage with standardized, consistent performance measurement. VA's electronic health records provide patient-specific, comprehensive clinical decision support that results in a performance measurement system that encourages driven evidence-based practice.

Clinical Data Management

VistA supports quality health care with an integrated health information and management system that is available in all VA health care facilities. The VistA framework consists of more than 100 programs that support the day-to-day clinical, financial, and administrative functions of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

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VHA developed the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) to provide a user interface for the information captured in VistA. With CPRS, VHA health care professionals can access patient information at the point of care across multiple sites and clinical disciplines. CPRS is used by health care providers to update a patient's medical history, place a variety of clinical orders and review laboratory results, medical images and current medications. VA clinicians and patients use information in CPRS to make diagnostic and treatment decisions affecting the veteran's health care.

Other VA systems supported by VistA and CPRS to facilitate the clinical decision-making process include VistA Imaging and Bar Code Medication Administration (BCMA). VistA Imaging makes medical images available through CPRS at any time from any workstation in any medical center and many ambulatory clinics. VistA Imaging stores medical images, pathology slides, cardiology exam results, endoscopies and scanned documents for viewing through CPRS as soon as they are available. BCMA provides real-time patient medication information, ensures medication administration accuracy and increases availability of medication administration documentation at the point of care. Using bar code technology and real-time medication administration information, BCMA automates the medication administration process to ensure each patient receives the correct medication, in the correct dose, at the correct time.

My HealtheVet Personal Health Record

My HealtheVet is a nationwide initiative intended to improve the overall health of veterans. The My HealtheVet portal provides a secure, online environment where veterans can view and manage their Personal Health Record, access clinically relevant and objective health information, perform health assessments and use electronic services such as Prescription Refill. My HealtheVet gives veterans an active role in their health care planning.

Telemedicine

Telemedicine extends the reach of VA medical providers to care for eligible veterans at a distance. Patients use monitoring devices to check vital signs such as blood pressure and weight; the results are uploaded to their My HealtheVet webpage or transferred directly into the computerized patient record. Telemedicine allows physicians to monitor patients remotely and clinically intervene when necessary, yet gives patients the option to stay home.

Performance Measurement

While other electronic health records exist, VistA is innovative because it supports both performance measurement and improvement. Clinicians designed CPRS to present patient data in ways that enhance clinical decision-making, save time and result in improved outcomes for veterans.

VistA's notable achievements include:

- BCMA has virtually eliminated medication administration errors.
- Health care providers can consult evidence-based guidelines through VistA. Using clinical reminders, VHA can implement evidence-based guidelines to ensure patients receive care according to best practices.
- CPRS includes a notification system that helps to reduce errors by alerting providers about significant events such as abnormal test results, potential drug-drug interactions and allergies.
- VHA has realized increased productivity and a reduction in operating costs through the use of VistA by eliminating duplicate tests and unnecessary hospitalizations.

Further information about Innovations and VistA is available on the web at <http://www.innovations.va.gov>.

