VA EHRM Data Migration Milestone FAQ

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What is EHRM?

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) Program is a historic IT modernization effort to implement the same Cerner Millennium electronic health record (EHR) that powers the Department of Defense's (DoD) MHS GENESIS system. The new Cerner EHR will replace 130 operational instances of VA's legacy Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA), enabling VA and DoD providers to view, update and exchange patient health information in one standardized, interoperable EHR. This effort will support a lifetime of seamless care by improving the experience of Veterans as they transition from military careers, provide clinicians with a full picture of a patient's medical history and drive better clinical outcomes.

What is the EHRM Data Migration Milestone? Why is it important?

VA and Cerner transferred over 30 years of VistA health data into the same Cerner data center that hosts MHS GENESIS. This transfer included health records for 23.5 million living and deceased Veterans who have received care and benefits from VA.

For more than a decade, VA and DoD have worked to establish a common EHR system to support health care for service members and Veterans. Migrating this data is a critical milestone toward achieving that goal. When the Cerner EHR is fully implemented, it will provide Veterans and service members with one lifetime health record, regardless of where they receive care.

How much and what types of data were migrated during the initial transfer?

The data transferred during the migration encompasses 20, clinically designated relevant data domains for patient health information, including vital signs, lab results, pharmacy prescriptions, inpatient and outpatient diagnoses, procedures, and more for 23.5 million Veterans who have received care and benefits from VA. The range of data consists of:

- About 50 terabytes (TB) of data.
- Over 77 billion records.
- Data elements spanning 21 clinical domains of patient health records, which includes lab results; pharmacy prescriptions; inpatient and outpatient diagnoses and procedures; as well as other Veteran medical data.

How was the VA data transferred to the Cerner data center?

VA encrypted the data and uploaded it to a secure Cerner data storage device. This hard drive was transported to the Cerner data center where it was securely uploaded to dedicated government servers. VA and Cerner then tested and validated the data to ensure it was accurate and complete.

How will the records stored at Cerner's data center be kept current?

As part of the migration process, Cerner and VA established a secure synchronization process between VistA and the Cerner data center that is compliant with national cyber security standards. This data stream provides near real-time updates to Veteran health records, ensuring all changes in VistA are replicated and accessible in the new EHR solution. This enables VA clinicians and staff to maintain full, uninterrupted access to patient health information without impacting Veteran care.

This data stream will remain in place until all VA facilities have access to the new EHR system. Additionally, Cerner will leverage capabilities within the Joint Legacy Viewer (JLV) to communicate record updates made at VA facilities have already transitioned to those not-yet-converted to the new EHR.

Why was the data physically transferred via a hard drive?

The aggregated VA data set was too large to efficiently transfer through the secure VA to Cerner data stream within program timelines.

What precautions were taken to ensure that the data migration process kept VA and Veteran data secure?

Protecting Veteran health information is a top priority for the EHRM program. VA and Cerner employed state-of-the-art, federally compliant encryption measures, and ensured the data was under constant supervision of VA personnel while in transit.

Is data stored at the Cerner data center currently being used by VA health care practitioners as they provide care and services to Veterans?

Not yet. To ensure uninterrupted access throughout implementation of the new EHR, VA health care practitioners will continue to use VistA until their site adopts the new system. This approach also ensures sufficient backup to guard against potential data loss.

Health care practitioners will begin to access the information stored at the Cerner data center at their scheduled go-live date.

Was there any disruption to Veteran care during the data migration?

No, the data migration process did not cause any disruption to VA employees or to patients' access to their health information. Additionally, to facilitate a smooth transition to the new EHR and mitigate potential clinical impacts, VA is continuing to invest in and maintain VistA, its Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS), and JLV until all VA facilities have fully integrated the new EHR.

What was done to ensure all data was prioritized appropriately and accurately transferred?

Cerner and VA have established several technical and clinical/functional work groups to ensure all Veteran health records are transferred completely and accurately. These groups meet regularly to identify and prioritize critical VA EHR data fields and discuss how best to map those elements to Cerner's data scheme.

Will there be more data transfers throughout this migration process?

Yes, data migration is a multiphase process that will take place over the next several months. Technical and clinical/functional work groups set the priorities for each phase and determine the specific data sets that will be transferred. After the initial phase, additional smaller sets of data will be migrated prior to go-live at Initial Operating Capability (IOC) sites.

What does "Initial Operating Capability (IOC)" mean?

IOC is a period of time during the implementation process planned for Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM). The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Cerner are continuing to prepare for the implementation of the new electronic health record (EHR), at IOC sites Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Spokane, Washington, and the VAMC's four community-based outpatient clinics. VA Puget Sound Health Care System's Seattle and American Lake Divisions, and its eight community-based outpatient clinics, will go live at a future date in first quarter of fiscal year 2021. The phased rollout approach will enable VA to identify early challenges and make appropriate adjustments for future VA site implementations.

What does Go-Live mean?

Go-Live is the event when onsite staff will begin to use the new VA EHR system and associated workflows to deliver health care to our Veterans. Go-Live takes place as part of every facility's EHR implementation.

What changes can Veterans and VA health care practitioners expect once the data migration is complete?

There will be no immediate changes for providers working in VistA and CPRS as a result of this initial data migration. This preliminary technical work will ensure uninterrupted access to Veteran health information as VA facilities begin using the new EHR starting next year.

At the time of go live in each facility, VA staff will be able to access migrated data, as well as data from DoD's MHS GENESIS system. The first IOC sites in the Pacific Northwest are slated to begin using the new EHR in 2020, with all VA facilities becoming operational by 2027.

For more information, visit the EHRM website. To learn about the initial phase of data migration, see the Data Migration Fact Sheet.