Blue Button for America

February 5, 2013 by Matthew McCall and Henry Wei

In August 2010, President Obama announced the Blue Button in a speech to the national convention of Disabled American Veterans. In his remarks, he said that "for the first time ever Veterans will be able to go to the VA website, click a simple Blue Button, and download or print your personal health records so you have that when you need them and can share that with your doctors outside of the VA."

What began as a simple, ultra-low-cost experiment has spread quickly. The cumulative number of Veterans Affairs (VA) Blue Button downloads is already over 2.7 million and growing, and the program has been adopted by both the Department of Defense and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

As we wrap up our work as the inaugural "Blue Button for America" Presidential Innovation Fellows (PIFs), we wanted to explain how we used this opportunity to advance that vision of patient access that began with Veterans to serve all Americans.

As Blue Button PIFs, we focused on two things: making the downloadable health record as complete as possible, which makes it even more useful to Veterans, and implementing it in a way that can be a model for every patient and health care system in the nation.

Here are highlights of what we and our teammates at the VA and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services accomplished over the last six months:

• In January 2013, we deployed the ability for Veterans with MyHealtheVet accounts to download virtually their entire medical record; they can get everything but radiological images, which are in development and coming soon.

• Veterans can also now get their care summaries in a standardized, structured file that makes it much easier to share with other providers, pharmacies, and people they trust – using an industry-standard format that every provider in the country will soon use.

• The entire software package enabling this will be soon be available at the open source custodian www.osehra.org.

• With HHS' Blue Button PIF Ryan Panchadsaram, we ran a Health Design Challenge to reimagine what the "human-readable" version of the new Blue Button download could look like – a contest that attracted over 230 submissions from designers across the country. The best submissions succeed in making your health record easy to understand, and are being developed right now as a VA Center for Innovation (VACI) open source project. You can see them at www.healthdesignchallenge.com.

• Over 85 million Americans have access to Blue Button data from at least one source today, and we have verbal commitments that will bring us to over 115 million by the end of the year.

> • VA is also implementing the capability to allow patients to securely, directly, and automatically transmit their records – including updates – to recipients they specify. This is a capability that other health care organizations will be adopting as well. You can learn about this upcoming capability by visiting www.bluebuttonplus.org.

We had the tremendous privilege of briefing VA Secretary Shinseki and, the next day, President Obama about our work. We told them about how the personal health data environment is about to change dramatically, that giving patients secure access to their own health data is key to that transformation, and that Blue Button is at the vanguard of that change.

The program is a template already being adopted by organizations across the country, and is a great example of VA's commitment to deliver the "best care anywhere." That care is even better when you as a patient can share information with any doctor you choose.

More information is available about Blue Button at HealthIT.gov/BlueButton. Innovators, developers and health data holders are also invited to BlueButtonPlus.org for practical technical guidance.

We are deeply honored to have become part of the Blue Button movement, and are incredibly excited to see where it will go next!

Dr. Henry Wei is a Presidential innovation fellow working on Blue Button for America at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Matt McCall is a Presidential innovation fellow working on Blue Button for America at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Ryan Panchadsaram is a Presidential innovation fellow working on Blue Button for America at the Department of Health and Human Services.

To learn more about or apply for the Presidential Innovation Fellows program, please visit: WhiteHouse.gov/InnovationFellows

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1. *Michael J. Breedlove* says:

   This will be very useful if used properly. It can and will save time and energy . But should not be used against the people.

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Blue Button for America

By Matthew McCall and Henry Wei

5 Feb 2013

Presidential innovation fellows working on Blue Button for America at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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- ## VA Disability Compensation Increases in 2013

By Samantha O'Neil

4 Feb 2013

Communications specialist, Veterans Benefits Administration

Last month, the more than four million Veterans and survivors who receive compensation benefits from VA saw an increase of 1.7 percent in their total monthly payment.

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Building Renovation to Help Homeless Veterans

By Donna Beiter

1 Feb 2013

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System

Sixty-five homeless Veterans will have a chance to transition back into society when the renovation of a building is completed at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center.

Tell Your Story – Apply to Become a Tillman Military Scholar

By Ed Woodward

24 Jan 2013

U.S. Air Force Veteran and 2012 Tillman Military Scholar

Every member of the military has a story and they are as varied and unique as the individuals who have chosen to serve their country…and this is mine.The Pat Tillman Foundation wants you to tell your story in your own words while they help alleviate some of the financial obstacles that impede your ability to achieve your educational and career goals.

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- Keeping in Touch: VBA Conducts Outreach and Collects Feedback

By Richard Allen Smith

18 Jan 2013

U.S. Army Veteran; Communications Specialist, Veterans Benefits Administration

Representatives from VBA's Benefits Assistance Service (BAS) conduct dozens of outreach activities each year. It's just one of the many ways VBA stays in contact with the Veterans we serve.

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VA Responding to Flu Outbreak to Protect Veterans

By Victoria Davey

16 Jan 2013

Chief officer of public health, Veterans Health Administration

VHA is responding vigorously to the nationwide flu outbreak to protect the health of all Veterans and staff in the VA health system.

- ## [12 Veterans, 3 Bands, One Cause](#)

  By [Maureen Bail](#)

  15 Jan 2013

  Program Assistant for Vocational Rehabilitation, Philadelphia RO

  Veterans live with the reality of PTSD every day, and two VA employees found a unique way to help raise awareness and funds for PTSD services.

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- ## [Mission ReDefined: Encouraging Vets With Physical Disabilities to Take on Sports](#)

  By [Doug Williams](#)

  15 Jan 2013

  Freelance Writer

  The "Mission Redefined" campaign, a joint effort by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Paralympics, released a public service announcement on Jan. 15 that features disabled Veteran Johnston sprinting down a track.

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