



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20503

December 6, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR DEPUTY CHIEF MANAGEMENT OFFICER FOR DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AND DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

FROM: Steven VanRoekel  
U.S. Chief Information Officer

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Todd Park  
U.S. Chief Technology Officer

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SUBJECT: Implementation of the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record and Integrated Electronic Health Record

Background

On April 9, 2009, President Obama charged the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to “work together to define and build a seamless system of integration with a simple goal: When a member of the Armed Forces separates from the military, he or she will no longer have to walk paperwork from a Department of Defense duty station to a local Department of Veterans Affairs health center; their electronic records will transition along with them and remain with them forever.” To answer the President’s call, the Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) launched the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) effort, which will contain both administrative (i.e. personnel and benefits) and medical information, and provide access to information from day one of a Servicemember’s military career through transition to Veteran status and beyond.

On December 4, 2012, DoD and VA briefed the White House on current challenges with the implementation of VLER, heavily focusing on the Integrated Electronic Health Record (iEHR), which will create a unified lifetime electronic health record for Servicemembers and Veterans. The joint work of the two Departments on iEHR is enormously important on several dimensions. Most importantly, this work will improve the quality of care provided to the men and women who serve in the military and their families. In addition, through this work, the Federal Government has an opportunity to help further advance health information technology (IT) in the federal and private sectors through the use of open standards and increased interoperability, which will benefit not just the VA and the DoD, but literally all providers and purchasers of health IT. However, given the large technological requirements and required resources, this initiative carries significant technological and financial risk, and needs to be implemented in the most effective and efficient manner to ensure return on the investment.

The Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs and White House agreed to work together closely over the next several months to tackle and resolve key issues. The Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs have directed their staffs to develop a plan to accelerate the current iEHR program to meet or beat scheduled targets, using open architecture and non-proprietary design. In specific, the two departments agreed to take the following actions to help VLER and iEHR succeed:

- DoD and VA will submit an updated background document that includes: 1) an outline of VLER/iEHR milestone progress and achievements to date, noting any deviation from the original milestones and timeline; 2) a breakout of current funding allocations to date that describes what software or other deliverables have been produced with the resources expended; 3) information about the scale and reach of the iEHR effort (number of clinical sites, number of patients served, funding amount) along with private sector benchmarking data; 4) a description of currently deployed and future planned capabilities; and 5) any other challenges with recommendations for jointly resolving those issues. This document will delineate between the two types of VLER/iEHR milestones: those focused on open standards and data interoperability of current systems, and those focused on the full deployment of iEHR software capabilities. DoD and VA will also provide a detailed project plan and schedule for current VLER/iEHR milestones and objectives.

*Due date: Close of business on December 7, 2012*

- DoD and VA will immediately form a cross-Department workgroup to implement this newly agreed approach for the implementation of VLER/iEHR. DoD and VA will submit workgroup names and contact information to the White House.

*Due date: Close of business on December 7, 2012*

- DoD and VA will provide a status briefing on projected FY14 VLER/iEHR implementation costs.

*Due date: As soon as possible, but no later than December 18, 2012*

- DoD and VA will develop a recommended strategy to separate out and make rapid progress in 2013 on interoperability and exchange of health records between the DoD and VA, while continuing to pursue the common iEHR software platform in a linked, parallel effort. The interoperability and exchange strategy will build on and leverage activities such as:

- VA and DOD's common data model and synchronization efforts;
- Health IT standards adopted by the Department of Health and Human Services for Meaningful Use Stage 2, including content, vocabulary, and transport standards; and
- VA and DOD efforts to share data directly with patients, including initiatives such as Blue Button.

This strategy should enable significantly accelerated progress on the VLER component of the agenda, including both VA-DoD records exchange and the ability for the agencies to exchange information with private sector health care providers.

*Due date: January 15, 2013*

- DoD and VA will submit a draft proposal on how to reconcile and balance expectations concerning DoD's acquisition plan for iEHR with VA's modular development process. The objective is for VLER/iEHR execution to exhibit both large-scale program management discipline and drive forward using modular, best-practice IT development approaches that divide the work into manageable pieces that can be defined, developed, and deployed within months instead of several years.<sup>1</sup> DoD and VA are expected to prioritize VLER/iEHR efforts to ensure all milestones are met within schedule and budget.

*Due date: January 15, 2013*

- DoD and VA will work through and confirm a development approach that publishes open standards and interface specifications in a manner that enables stakeholders across the board to develop the ability to integrate with iEHR, while clearly retaining the right and obligation to test those integrations in the organizations' internal environments and ensure their true compatibility.

*Due date: January 15, 2013*

- DoD and VA will submit recommendations on reorganizing and improving VLER/iEHR governance. This governance proposal will include clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders based on an agreed upon set of objectives, take into account each Department's internal governance processes without impacting milestones and progress, and outline a standard process for the Interagency Program Office (IPO) to escalate and resolve issues as well as communicate progress to DoD and VA leadership. This structure and process will ensure that VA and DoD are supported as two equal partners.

*Due date: January 15, 2013*

- The Office of Management and Budget and Office of Science and Technology Policy will establish an executive steering committee that will host quarterly meetings with DoD and VA leadership to help advance the progress of VLER/iEHR. The committee's role will be to facilitate discussion on issues of concern and help resolve matters that may be in contention between the agencies. DoD and VA will be expected to provide an agenda and relevant background materials at least 72 hours in advance of each executive steering

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<sup>1</sup> OMB Contracting Guidance to Support Modular Development:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/procurement/guidance/modular-approaches-for-information-technology.pdf>

committee meeting, which will serve to update the committee on progress, costs, scheduling, and bring any obstacles, sources of delay, or similar issues, as well as recommendations, to the committee's attention.

*Due date: On-going; initial meeting to occur by January 21, 2013*

- DoD and VA will submit a revised lifecycle cost estimate for the iEHR that takes into account work already underway to assess variation across the capabilities to be deployed, overlap between those capabilities, the range of private sector technologies and service offerings that could be brought to bear, etc.

*Due date: February 4, 2013*

We greatly appreciate the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs' commitment to implementing VLER/iEHR successfully, and look forward to the path ahead.