



Highlights of [GAO-05-1051T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

For the past 7 years, the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DOD) have been working to exchange patient health information electronically and ultimately to have interoperable electronic medical records. Sharing medical information helps (1) promote the seamless transition of active duty personnel to veteran status and (2) ensure that active duty military personnel and veterans receive high-quality health care and assistance in adjudicating their disability claims. This is especially critical in the face of current military responses to national and foreign crises.

In testimony before the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in March and May 2004, GAO discussed the progress being made by the departments in this endeavor. In June 2004, at the Subcommittee's request, GAO reported on its review of the departments' progress toward the goal of an electronic two-way exchange of patient health records.

GAO is providing an update on the departments' efforts, focusing on (1) the status of ongoing, near-term initiatives to exchange data between the agencies' existing systems and (2) progress in achieving the longer term goal of exchanging data between the departments' new systems.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-1051T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Linda D. Koontz at (202) 512-6240 or koontzl@gao.gov.

COMPUTER-BASED PATIENT RECORDS

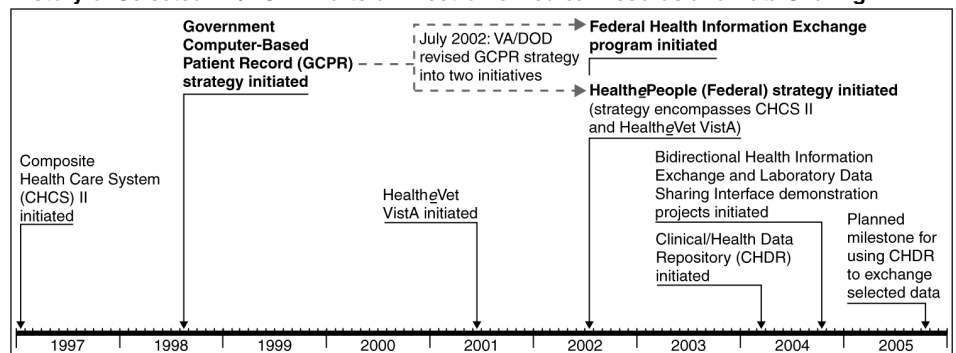
VA and DOD Have Made Progress, but Much Work Remains to Fully Share Medical Information

What GAO Found

In the past year, VA and DOD have begun to implement applications that exchange limited electronic medical information between the departments' existing health information systems. These applications are (1) Bidirectional Health Information Exchange, a project to achieve the two-way exchange of health information on patients who receive care from both VA and DOD, and (2) Laboratory Data Sharing Interface, an application used to electronically transfer laboratory work orders and results between the departments. The Bidirectional Health Information Exchange application has been implemented at five sites, at which it is being used to rapidly exchange information such as pharmacy and allergy data. Also, the Laboratory Data Sharing Interface application has been implemented at six sites, at which it is being used for real-time entry of laboratory orders and retrieval of results. According to the departments, these systems enable lower costs and improved service to patients by saving time and avoiding errors.

VA and DOD are continuing with activities to support their longer term goal of sharing health information between their systems (see figure), but the goal of two-way electronic exchange of patient records remains far from being realized. Each department is developing its own modern health information system—VA's HealthVet VistA and DOD's Composite Health Care System II—and they have taken steps to respond to GAO's June 2004 recommendations regarding the program to develop an electronic interface that will enable these systems to share information. That is, they have developed an architecture for the interface, established project accountability, and implemented a joint project management structure. However, they have not yet developed a clearly defined project management plan to guide their efforts, as GAO previously recommended. Further, they have not yet fully populated the repositories that will store the data for their future health systems, and they have experienced delays in their efforts to begin a limited data exchange. Lacking a detailed project management plan increases the risk that the departments will encounter further delays and be unable to deliver the planned capabilities on time and at the cost expected.

History of Selected VA/DOD Efforts on Electronic Medical Records and Data Sharing



Source: GAO analysis of VA and DOD data.