



Highlights of [GAO-09-775](#), a report to congressional committees

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

DOD and VA Efforts to Achieve Full Interoperability Are Ongoing; Program Office Management Needs Improvement

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 required the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to accelerate their exchange of health information and to develop systems or capabilities that allow for interoperability (generally, the ability of systems to exchange data) by September 30, 2009. It also required compliance with federal standards and the establishment of a joint interagency program office to function as a single point of accountability for the effort.

Further, the act directed GAO to semiannually report on the progress made in achieving these requirements. For this third report, GAO evaluated (1) the departments' progress and plans toward sharing fully interoperable electronic health information that comply with federal standards and (2) whether the interagency program office is positioned to function as a single point of accountability. To do so, GAO analyzed agency documentation on project status and conducted interviews with agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the departments improve management of their interoperability efforts by establishing a project plan and a complete and detailed integrated master schedule. Commenting on a draft of this report, DOD, VA, and the interagency program office concurred with GAO's recommendation.

[View GAO-09-775 or key components.](#) For more information, contact Valerie C. Melvin at (202) 512-6304 or melvinv@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

DOD and VA have taken steps to meet six objectives that they identified for achieving full interoperability in compliance with applicable standards (see table) by September 30, 2009. Specifically, the departments have achieved planned capabilities for three of the objectives—refine social history data, share physical exam data, and demonstrate initial network gateway operation. For the remaining three objectives, the departments have partially achieved planned capabilities, with additional work needed to fully meet the objectives. Regarding the objective to expand questionnaires and self-assessment tools, this additional work is intended to be completed by the deadline. The departments' officials have stated that they intend to meet the objectives to expand DOD's inpatient medical records system and demonstrate initial document scanning; however, additional work will be required beyond September to perform all the activities necessary to meet clinicians' needs for health information.

Description of DOD and VA Interoperability Objectives

Objective	Description
Refine social history data	DOD will begin sharing with VA social history data currently captured in the DOD electronic health record. Such data describe, for example, patients' involvement in hazardous activities and tobacco and alcohol use.
Share physical exam data	DOD will provide an initial capability to share with VA its electronic health record information that supports the physical exam process when a service member separates from active military duty.
Demonstrate initial network gateway operation	DOD and VA will demonstrate the operation of secure network gateways that provide expanded bandwidth to support information sharing between DOD and VA healthcare facilities.
Expand questionnaires and self-assessment tools	DOD will provide all periodic health assessment data stored in its electronic health record to VA such that questionnaire responses are viewable with the questions that elicited them.
Expand DOD inpatient medical records system	DOD will expand its inpatient medical records system to at least one additional site in each military medical department (one Army, one Air Force, and one Navy for a total of three sites).
Demonstrate initial document scanning	DOD will demonstrate an initial capability for scanning service members' medical documents into its electronic health record and sharing the documents electronically with VA.

Source: GAO based on DOD and VA data.

The DOD/VA Interagency Program Office is not yet effectively positioned to function as a single point of accountability for the implementation of fully interoperable electronic health record systems or capabilities between DOD and VA. While the departments have made progress in setting up the office by hiring additional staff, they continue to fill key leadership positions on an interim basis. Further, while the office has begun to demonstrate responsibilities outlined in its charter, it is not yet fulfilling key information technology management responsibilities in the areas of performance measurement (as GAO previously recommended), project planning, and scheduling, which are essential to establishing the office as a single point of accountability for the departments' interoperability efforts.