

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2017

The Honorable David J. Shulkin
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Shulkin and Secretary Mattis,

As Secretary Shulkin recently stated, “VA and DoD have worked together for many years to advance [Electronic Health Records] EHR interoperability between their many separate applications *at the cost of several hundred millions of dollars. ... The bottom line is we still don't have the ability to trade information seamlessly.*” To remedy historical failures in sharing medical records information, Secretary Shulkin announced that the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) would procure the same electronic health record (EHR) platform as the Department of Defense (DOD) to maximize continuity of medical care for service members transitioning to veteran status. We commend you both for your bold leadership in this area, and are looking forward to more initiatives between the DOD and the VA to share assets and coordinate efforts related to caring for our service members and veterans. The importance of effective, efficient, and integrated health systems cannot be overstated.

Recently, major federal IT infrastructure upgrades and overhauls have not had overwhelming success. We remain optimistic about the VA's EHR transition; however, we hold great concern that the scope of this project brings several risks related to excess costs and implementation delays. We implore the VA to work with DOD's experts to adopt any lessons learned and best practices from DoD's recent experience with Military Health System (MHS) Genesis implementation. We cannot afford any mistakes on this project, as it has immense implications for the future of the VA and the proper care of our millions of veterans. While you work together to create and integrated EHR platform, we request that you address the following questions in your response to us:

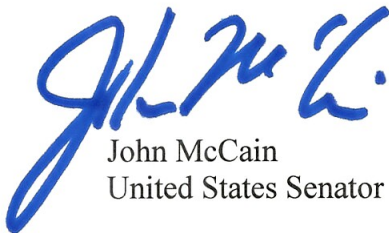
- Understanding the enormous scope of this project, what is the implementation and phasing plan? What is the projected timeline and what are major completion milestones?
- Given the Federal government's history of IT upgrade challenges, what are DOD's best practices and lessons learned that can be adopted by the VA? What specific plans,

controls or managerial tools are the VHA prepared to execute to ensure the aforementioned best practices are reviewed and adopted, when prudent?

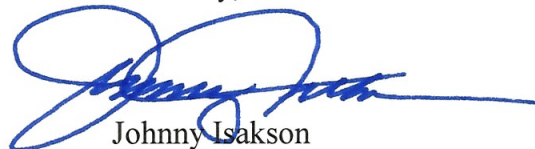
- How can both Departments ensure the implemented solution will transcend DOD, VHA and community systems, following a veteran across the entirety of the provided care options, ensuring seamless, real-time access to medical records documentation?
- What, if any, legislative hurdles or policy barriers do you foresee, and how can we work together to ensure the success of this joint initiative?
- What assessments of business process re-engineering will the VA undertake early in acquisition lifecycle of your EHR initiative?
- What oversight mechanisms will you put in place to ensure that the VA has a sufficient understanding of the existing business processes to be changed and that the VA will avoid excessive customization of the selected commercial off-the-shelf system?
- What efforts, if any, will be made to integrate Investment Review Boards (IRBs) at the beginning of the budget process to ensure sound budget decision-making in connection with this initiative?
- Do the DOD and VA intend to align the tenure of program executives responsible for the execution of this initiative with key decision points, to improve their ability to hold responsible personnel accountable?

Capitalizing on joint ventures between DOD and VA reduces redundancies, realizes economies of scale, and combines shared resources for more comprehensive solutions. We encourage both of you to explore additional areas within your departments for opportunities to collaborate. The unification of EHRs serves as the linchpin for further joint solutions. The American people deserve excellence from each of your departments, and we know each of you have the expertise and institutional knowledge to succeed through collaboration. Patriotic Americans volunteer to defend our nation and defend democracy around the world. Although the DOD and VA are different agencies, it is your joint obligation to support our patriots and their families in their journey, from first oath to eventual resting place. We owe our best to our brave warriors.

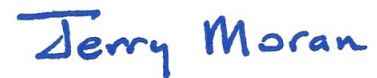
Sincerely,



John McCain
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator