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To: [Public Relations Division](#)
Subject: Release: American Legion disappointed by further delay in military's electronic health record
Date: Wednesday, November 20, 2013 12:03:00 PM

Legion disappointed by further delay in military's electronic health record

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20 -- The leader of the nation's largest veterans' service organization says he is "greatly disappointed" by news that the Department of Defense's (DoD) long promised modernized electronic health record (EHR) is still several years away from reality.

According to Oct. 31 presentations at an "industry day" staged by the Space and Naval Welfare Systems Command-Systems Center Atlantic, a new Pentagon-deployed EHR will not be readied for rollout until 2017 with further time being taken after that for full implementation.

"The seamless transition of medical records from the military to civilian sectors is essential to the timely, accurate and efficient processing of health benefit claims by VA," said Daniel M. Dellinger, national commander of the 2.4 million member American Legion. "It is key to finally ending the decades-old claims backlog debacle. Equally, if not more importantly, the seamless delivery of medical records afforded by an integrated DoD and VA EHR system would help assure the very best, 'gap free' medical treatment and care for veterans."

A previous effort to develop a joint electronic health record system was abandoned earlier this year due, in part, to cost considerations. The Federal Times reported that about \$1 billion had already been spent on the program prior to its halt. "Considering all that an EHR system would save, delaying its implementation to save cash flow is false economy," said Dellinger.

In Oct., 2012, American Legion leadership adopted a resolution urging Congress "to

provide oversight to the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that a Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) is fully implemented by Fiscal Year 2013." The then-proposed VLER would have incorporated both administrative and medical information about a servicemember transitioning to veteran status. In congressional testimony and elsewhere, the Legion has urged President Obama to direct that one agency's EHR system be used throughout the DoD and VA and that the two agencies fully disclose all contractors, costs and results regarding the system's development. The Legion has also asked Congress to fund a single EHR modernization effort across both agencies while suspending all other projects.

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