



News Release

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NEWS RELEASE

Date: July 15, 2016

Release Number: 201607-01-23

Dorn partners with national process improvement team in effort to continue improving quality of care and access to Veterans

By Bob Hall, Dorn VAMC public affairs specialist

It's not news that many Veterans believe that access to health care within the VA needs an overhaul. What many Veterans may not know is that improving access is exactly the focus of the "MyVA Access" initiative; a new push that Dr. David Shulkin, the VA's undersecretary of health, announced earlier this year.

"We are working to rebuild the trust of the American public and more importantly the trust of the Veterans whom we are proud to serve," Shulkin said at an April 2016 conference for the Association of the Health Care Journalists. "We are serious about our work to improve access to health care for our nation's Veterans. We want them to know that this is a new VA."

"Here at Dorn, we've made incredible strides to improve the quality of care and access to that care for our Veterans," said Timothy B. McMurry, the Dorn VAMC director. "To further underscore the MyVA Access initiative, we've recently partnered with a national-level improvement process team to ensure that we not only continue improve in these areas, but to help us identify any other gaps and help provide solutions.

The Veterans Engineering Resource Center is the team Dorn VAMC has partnered with to help bridge the gap between national policy makers and the medical center's frontline staff. The VERC is here to help facilitate Dorn VAMC to be able to continue and improve open access to the Veterans it serves by the end of the calendar year.

What sets this initiative apart from other process teams and previous initiatives is that the VERC is designed to create efficient workflow processes. The key elements to the VERC's Integrated System

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Deployment method are to include on-site education and training, access to subject-matter experts, and ongoing evaluations and feedback. Already at a national level, the VERC has developed new methods to systematic implement standardize solutions to VA facilities across the country. Now Dorn VAMC has a team on site to help implement those solutions.

The VERC's mission is to be a catalyst enabling collaboration among clinical, administrative, operations, academic, and research partnerships for the Department of Veteran Affairs at local, regional, and national levels. The team consists of industrial and systems engineers, analysts, healthcare systems specialists and clinicians who integrate directly with the health care providers at Dorn VAMC's facilities and business office.

What exactly does this mean for the Veterans? It means that Dorn VAMC is partnering in the largest organizational change effort ever conducted in the history of the VA to provide Veterans with the health care they need when they need it, rather than scheduling appointments weeks, or months, later. It means identifying gaps and looking for ways to standardize health care across the VA, so the availability and quality of care looks the same from one facility to another, or at the very least close to the same.

Unlike other national-level process improvement teams, which may be comprised of anywhere from 10 to 30 members, the VERC is comprised of more than 300 highly trained professionals. As an added bonus, most of the VERC team members already have a working knowledge of the VA and its processes.

Dorn VAMC is fortunate to have been assigned three of the VERC members to work directly for and with the leadership and staff here.

Brandon Rieke is a health systems specialist and has worked for the VERC for more than four years. He is responsible for project management, process improvement, and strategic planning. He holds a Bachelor of Science in management, and is Lean training certified. Rieke is also no stranger to the uniformed services as he is a combat Veteran who served more than seven years in the Army.

Rachael Neff is a health systems specialist who recently joined the VA community after retiring from the Army last November. She too is a combat Veteran who has both a Masters and is a doctoral candidate in Industrial/Organizational Psychology.

Cyrus Hillsman is an industrial engineer who has worked in process improvement and quality for more than 30 years. He has a doctorate in industrial engineering and Bachelor of Science in finance and management information systems.

"We are here to partner with Dorn VAMC on their journey to rebuilding trust with the Veterans and community," Rieke said.

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“Successful systems engineering is somewhat new to health care systems thinking and has changed other sectors including defense, automotive, and service” Hillsman said. “The difference in health care, and at Dorn, is the critical nature and obligation we have for patients’ safety and emotional concerns.”

“Each time a Veteran steps through our doors, his or her visit here is personal and unique,” McMurry said. “We know changes need to be made. The same is true in any industry; health care is no exception. We strive to ensure the best health care is given in each situation and it is our hopes that by partnering with the VERC we can improve the quality of care even more.”

More than 30 VA facilities across the nation currently offer same-day appointments, and the VA, to include the Dorn VAMC leadership, are determined to offer the same services by the end of the calendar year.

“Dorn is the second fastest improving VA health care facility in the country and rates in the top 10 percent most efficient facilities,” McMurry added. “This is a result of creating a culture of improvement over the past two and half years and we plan to continue into the future.

“So it makes sense for us to partner with the VERC in order to get to that next level of excellence. Our Veterans and employees deserve only the best.”