WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs recently awarded a contract for a commercially available, off-the-shelf online patient self-scheduling system through a mobile application, or app, that will help improve access to care for Veterans.

Awarded to Document Storage Systems on April 14, the contract supports the Faster Care for Veterans Act of 2016, which requires VA to establish an 18-month trial program operational in at least three Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), under which Veterans can use a cell phone, tablet, computer or mobile device to schedule and confirm primary care, specialty care and mental health appointments.

“The VA is making critical improvements to Veteran health care, and will always look to leverage innovative tools that will put more capabilities in the hands of Veterans,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “Self-scheduling apps are widely used in the private sector and will help create a better experience for Veterans and their medical-care providers.”

VA’s Mobile Veterans Appointment Request (VAR) app, currently available at 99 sites, also provides most of the key capabilities required by the Faster Care for Veterans Act, and is modeled after successful mobile applications used for patient scheduling. VA intends to continue development of VAR to incorporate new capabilities.

VA, WFW and Walgreens enhance access to resources

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and drugstore chain Walgreens announced a collaborative agreement May 6, which will help improve mental health care for Veterans through enhanced education, access to resources and outreach.

VA, VFW and Walgreens will work together to reach Veterans in communities across the country with targeted initiatives to address mental health awareness and treatment, Veteran suicide prevention and opioid overdose education.

“Our work is driven by our commitment to encourage Veterans to get the care and services they need and integrate mental health care as part of their overall wellness and healthy lifestyle,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “Joining forces with VFW and Walgreens provides VA an opportunity to further expand our reach and connect with Veterans, their families and the community to raise mental health awareness.”

As part of the collaboration, VA, VFW and Walgreens will:

... educate VFW members to help reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions, as well as encourage seeking help through VA. The outreach effort includes Walgreens and VA programming at several upcoming state VFW meetings.

... jointly promote and coordinate with VA’s Make the Connection campaign with the goal of helping to fundamentally change how people think and talk about mental health. Through Veterans’ own stories of treatment and recovery, Make the Connection shows the many benefits of opening up about mental health concerns and making mental health awareness and treatment part of a healthy lifestyle.

... share patient education materials to help build awareness of both Walgreens and VA initiatives to prevent opioid overdose through education, proper disposal of unused medication and access to naloxone, a lifesaving medication that is an antidote to opioids that can prevent fatal opioid overdose.

... explore training programs and opportunities for Wal-
VA & Hepatitis C: More than 80,000 patients – 90% cure rate

By Elizabeth Maguire, MSW
Center for Healthcare Organization and Implementation Research

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month and VA has made great progress in testing, treating, and curing hepatitis C (Hep C) for Veterans enrolled in VA health care.

As of December 2016, 75 percent of VA’s patients born between 1945 and 1965, (a group shown to have higher rates of Hep C) had been tested. And 98 percent of all Veterans tested have had reflex confirmatory testing performed on those results, an important step. These are far better rates than any other large health care organization in the U.S.

VA has also treated more patients for hepatitis C than any other health care system in the U.S. and in almost all other countries. Since the availability of all oral antiviral treatments in 2014 through January 2017, we’ve treated more than 80,000 patients with cure rates more than 90 percent. We are continuing to treat approximately 2,000 Veterans each month. As of Dec. 31, 2016, there were approximately 64,000 Veterans with Hep C in VA care who are potentially eligible for treatment.

We want to reach those patients and get them treatment as quickly as possible.

We’re also estimating that as many as 30 percent of those Veterans in VA healthcare who are still awaiting treatment are not currently willing or able to initiate treatment. Our office has been focusing on outreach to bring these patients in for testing and treatment.

In March, we launched a national advertising campaign to increase efforts in local areas that had the highest numbers of Veterans that need treatment. These advertisements feature four Veterans who have been cured of Hep C and want to pass along the importance of testing and treatment.

Collaboration
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greens pharmacists and Healthcare Clinic nurse practitioners, to enhance providers’ ability to recognize Veteran-specific needs, and to better understand the military culture, which may influence Veterans’ willingness to seek help.

“We know that the rate of suicide is increasing for all Americans, but the rate of increase is much slower for Veterans who receive VA care,” said Dr. Poonam Alaigh, Acting VA Under Secretary for Health. “With this in mind, we need to cast a wider net and meet Veterans where they live to better engage them in care.”

“The mental well-being of America’s Veterans is of the utmost importance to the VFW,” said VFW National Commander Brian Duffy. “By working with several organizations including Walgreens and VA, we’re able to positively impact a great number of Veterans, and help to change the narrative associated with mental wellness.”

“We’re proud of the collaborations we’ve developed to provide greater access to pharmacy and health-care services for current and former members of the armed services, including retirees and their families,” said Brad Fluegel, Walgreens Chief Healthcare Commercial Market Development Officer. “We look forward to working closely with VA and VFW to help heighten mental-health awareness and hope to improve the health and well-being of more Veterans by connecting them with VA, VFW and other resources that can help.”

VA is a leader in educating patients about the risks of opioids, including opioid medications and dispensing naloxone to interested patients. To date, VA has issued naloxone to more than 60,000 Veterans to prevent overdose. Separately, other pharmacies, including Walgreens, have installed safe, medication-disposal kiosks and made naloxone available without requiring a prescription.

For more information about VA mental health services, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov. Information about VFW may be found at www.vfw.org. More information about Walgreens may be found at www.walgreens.com.
WASHINGTON — In his fiscal year 2018 budget, President Donald Trump is proposing $186.5 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The budget request will ensure the nation’s Veterans receive high-quality health care and timely access to benefits and services.

The budget also supports the continued transformation of VA to rebuild the full trust of Veterans as a premier provider of choice for their services and benefits.

“The 2018 budget request reflects the strong commitment of the president to provide the services and benefits that our nation’s Veterans have earned,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “VA has made significant progress in improving its service to Veterans and their family members. We are fully committed to continuing the transformation across the department, so we can deliver the standards of performance our Veterans expect and deserve.”

This year’s budget request includes 82 legislative proposals that will help enable the department to better serve Veterans.

**Highlights from the President’s 2018 Budget Request for VA**

The FY 2018 budget includes $82.1 billion in discretionary funding, largely for health care, and $104.3 billion in mandatory funding for benefit programs, such as disability compensation and pensions, and for continuation of the Veterans Choice Program (Choice Program).

The discretionary budget request is $4.3 billion (5.5 percent) above the 2017 enacted level, including nearly $3.3 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments.

The budget also requests $74 billion, including collections, for the 2019 advance appropriations for medical care, an increase of $1.7 billion and 2.4 percent above the 2018 medical care budget request. The request includes $107.7 billion in 2019 mandatory advance appropriations for Compensation and Pensions; Readjustment Benefits; and Veterans Insurance and Indemnities benefits programs in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

**Health Care**

With a total medical care budget of $75.2 billion, including collections and new mandatory funding for the Choice Program, VA is positioned to continue expanding health-care services to over 7 million patients.

Health care is being provided to more than 858,000 Veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn/Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. Major categories funded within the health care budget are:

- $13.2 billion for community care;
- $8.8 billion for long-term care;
- $8.4 billion for mental health care;
- $1.7 billion for programs for homeless and at-risk Veterans;
- $751 million for Hepatitis-C treatment;
- $604 million for Caregivers’ benefits; and
- $316 million for treatment of traumatic brain injuries.

**Expanding Access**

The president’s budget ensures that care and other benefits are available to Veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are:

- $13.2 billion for community care, compared with $11.2 billion in 2017, a 13 percent increase;
- $505 million for gender-specific health-care services for women, an increase of 7 percent over the 2017 level;
- $862 million for the activation of new and enhanced health-care facilities;
- $855 million for major and minor construction projects, including a new outpatient clinic at Livermore, California, and expansion of cemeteries at Calverton, New York; Sacramento, California; Bushnell, Florida; Phoenix, Arizona; Bridgeville, Pennsylvania; and Elwood, Illinois.

**Disability Compensation Claims Backlog and Appeals Reform**

VBA has continued aggressive efforts aimed at bringing down the disability compensation claims backlog, completing a record-breaking 1.3 million claims in 2016 and reducing the
Nurses from the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center celebrated the professional of nursing during the National Nurses Week beginning May 6 and culminating on May 12, the birthday of Florence Nightingale. Nightingale was an English nurse became known as the founder of professional nursing, especially due to her pioneering work during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Due to her habit of making rounds at night, Nightingale became known as “The Lady with the Lamp.” National Nurses Week was first observed in October 1954, the 100th anniversary of Nightingale’s mission to Crimea. May 6 was introduced as the date for the observance in 1982.
Anderson nurse manager brings home the Gold

By Jennifer Scales
Dorn VAMC Public Affairs

“’She goes to work ready to tackle any problems the day brings and still comes home smiling’, begins a husband, as he sings the praises of his wife. “She brings the life experience of caring for multiple people, --me, five kids, in-laws, and now her father--into her job and gets Veterans the best care, without sacrificing professionalism and customer service.”

The wife in reference just happens to be nurse manager for the Anderson, S.C. Community Based Outpatient Clinic, Tiffany Frialde, with the words of adoration from her husband, Dr. Jose Frialde, a physician at the same CBOC.

Though Frialde has been the clinic’s care manager since 2014, she was in place as a contract clinical registered nurse in 2007. Within five years she then became a Patient Aligned Care Team Care (PACT) Manager.

As with many of the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center employees, Frialde says she gets immense personal satisfaction and finds her career to be extremely rewarding.

“I have always enjoyed every job in nursing,” Frialde said.

“There is just something about Veterans,” Frialde continued. “They are always grateful, even while facing challenges. I enjoy finding the resolution to their challenges and they always thank us for doing a good job.”

When it comes to the staff at the Anderson CBOC, Frialde shared her thoughts in working with them. “I encourage them to be the best they can be, because I am 100 per cent on their side,” she said.

Frialde is a New York native, born in the town of Lockport, which is near Buffalo. Her high school alma mater rests at West Seneca East Senior High School, located in West Seneca.

Her nursing journey began with an associate’s degree acquired from Troicare College in Buffalo. Realizing that the journey was just getting started, the course of her career continued when she graduated Suma Cum Laude from Clemson University in the RN to BSN program, in which her blood became ‘orange’ for the Tigers.

Frialde proudly credits her matriarch mother, Barbara Porter, with just the right push in her career. “She had the knack for encouraging us to seek the impossible and push through adversity. She was not afraid to go out on the limb for what is right, while still grabbing the ‘bull by the horns’, so to speak,” Frialde said.

The matriarch of the family also supported her other siblings which included Frialde’s twin brother, Todd; brother Robert who resides in Illinois; sister, Mai; and sister figure, Mimi Huynh Lam.

Frialde has a rare distinction in South Carolina that makes her stand out as one of the best in her field. She and two other submissions from the Dorn VA Medical Center were selected as recipients for the annual Palmetto Gold Award at the annual Gala in Columbia, April 22.

According to the website, the award was established in 2001 when a coalition of nurse leaders representing major nursing organizations in South Carolina met to discuss the formation of an annual statewide nursing recognition program that would both showcase the valuable contributions nurses make to patient care in South Carolina and to raise funds to provide scholarships for registered nurse students.

The program’s two-fold purpose is to first recognize registered nurses in South Carolina who exemplify excellence in nursing practice and commitment to the nursing profession; secondly is to support the future of nursing by using the proceeds from the Gala event to provide an annual $1,000 nursing scholarship to each registered nurse undergraduate program in the state.

“I honestly didn’t think I would win,” Frialde said. “I am humbled by this honor and I give credit to my incredible staff, because without them, this would not be possible.”

Other staff members embrace her totally as winning and being a supervisor. “She is outstanding and always a professional,” Franklin Bruton said, medical support assistant for the Anderson CBOC. “She is organized and will always keep us informed, and is willing to find the answers if we need further assistance.”

Another employee added that there is enjoyment in working with Frialde. “She makes things run efficiently and is the epitome of professionalism,” Larisha Thompson, MSA supervisor for Anderson and Greenville CBOC’s, said. “She is veteran-centered and continues to help us, as employees, meet the benchmark.”

She is surrounded by several medical ingénue’s, in

Satisfaction, passion, commitment to Veterans, employees contribute
claims backlog by 88 percent, cumulatively, from a peak of 611,000 claims in March 2013 to 71,690 on Sept. 30, 2016.

In 2016, Veterans waited, on average, 203 fewer days for a decision than four years ago. In 2018, VBA is projected to complete 1.4 million claims, and the number of claims pending longer than 125 days is anticipated to remain at about 70 thousand claims.

This pending claims status may change as the volume of claims receipts increases or decreases, and as claims processing becomes more efficient. VBA’s success in reducing the rating claims backlog has also resulted in a growing appeals inventory.

From 2010 through 2016, VBA completed more than 1 million disability compensation rating claims annually. Approximately 11 percent to 12 percent of VBA decisions are appealed, with nearly half of those being formally appealed to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (the Board).

While the appeal rate has remained steady over the past two decades, the appeals volume has increased proportionately to the increase in claims decisions. The average processing time for resolving appeals in 2016 was three years. For those appeals that reached the board, average processing time was six years, with thousands of Veterans waiting much longer.

VA has worked with Congress, Veteran Service Organizations and other stakeholders to develop a legislative proposal to reform the appeals process. The appeals process under current law is ineffective and confusing, and Veterans wait much too long for a decision on appeal.

The new process will: 1) establish options for Veterans, 2) provide early resolution and improved notifications as to best options, 3) eliminate the perpetual churn of appeals inherent to the existing process, 4) provide Veterans feedback loops to VBA, and 5) improve transparency of the process by clearly defining the roles of VBA and the board throughout the appeals process.

Appeals reform is one of VA’s top legislative priorities, and the department will continue to work with Congress and the VSOs to ensure Veterans receive the best possible service.

Improving the Veteran Experience

National Call Centers: In 2018, VA expects the NCCs to sustain the average speed of answering in 30 seconds or less, while maintaining exceptional customer satisfaction.

National Work Queue: In 2017, disability compensation claims are moving through the process faster than before implementation of the NWQ process — on average, claims are ready for decision 14 days faster. In 2018, NWQ will be expanded to other key VBA priorities such as the nonrating and appeals workload distribution.

Veterans Claim Intake Program/ Centralized Mail: By the end of 2018, VCIP will relocate the entire file banks of remaining Regional Offices and convert the documents electronically, an integral element of VBA’s comprehensive transformation and modernization strategy.

In 2018, Centralized Mail will build
Budget
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upon sustained progress in disability compensation and expand to additional stakeholders, to include the Board of Veteran Appeals, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, Fiduciary Service, Support Services Division, Debt Management Center and Loan Guaranty.

Veterans Homelessness
The budget requests $1.7 billion for programs to prevent or reduce Veteran homelessness, including:

• $320 million for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) to promote housing stability;
• $543 million for the HUD-VASH program, wherein VA provides case management services for at-risk Veterans and their families and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides permanent housing through its Housing Choice Voucher program; and
• $257 million in grant and per diem payments that support transitional housing provided by community-based organizations.

Veterans Choice Program—Community Care
VA is requesting a total of $13.2 billion in 2018 for Veterans Community Care. This consists of a request for $9.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Medical Community Care account, plus an additional $2.9 billion in new mandatory budget authority for the Choice Program.

When combined with $626 million in estimated start-of-year unobligated balances from the original Choice Program appropriation, the total Community Care funding level is $13.2 billion in 2018. The budget also requests $3.5 billion in mandatory budget authority in 2019 for the Choice Program.

This additional funding will allow VA to continue increasing Veterans’ access to health-care services by allowing them to choose VA direct care or community care.

Other Key Services for Veterans
• $306 million to administer VA’s system of 136 national cemeteries, including funding for the activation of three new cemeteries that will open in 2018 and 2019. Funds are also included to raise, realign, and clean headstones to ensure VA national cemeteries are maintained as shrines.
• $4.1 billion for information technology (IT), including investments to strengthen cybersecurity, modernize Veterans’ electronic health records, improve Veterans’ access to benefits, and enhance the IT infrastructure; and
• $135 million for state cemetery grants and state extended-care grants.

Enhanced Oversight of VA’s Programs
• The 2018 budget requests $159.6 million for the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to enhance oversight and assist the OIG in fulfilling its statutory mission of making recommendations that will help VA improve the care and services it provides.

Frialede
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addition to her husband, in her family. Daughter Ashleigh is currently in medical school at the St. James School of Medicine in St. Vincent, Grenada, since her graduation from Clemson. Other children running ‘orange’ blood at Clemson are Amanda, studying veterinary medicine and Aaron who is involved in computer science. Son Adam is a junior at T. L. Hanna High School in Anderson while Anthony attends McCants Middle School.

Frialede likes to take a break, just like everyone else. You may find her belting out a Karaoke tune with family and friends, snorkeling, hosting monthly themed dinner parties, traveling around the world from New York to Paris, but more than likely at a tailgate event when the Clemson Tigers season is occurring.

Passion is the theme Frialede says should be the foundation in a person’s work. “If you are passionate about what you do, then you know it will be done well. That is especially applicable when it comes to working with Veterans and other staff,” said Frialede.

Veterans Town Hall

The Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center will host a Veterans Town Hall Meeting on July 20 for Veterans and family members living in Anderson area or any Veteran in Upstate who receives care from the Dorn VAMC.

The town hall meeting is tentatively scheduled for 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., but the location has yet to be determined.

Topics to be discussed at this forum include: new leadership changes at Dorn VAMC, improvements in patient care and nursing services, and Veterans benefits in general.
Frequently Called Numbers

Admissions ............................................................. (803) 776-4000 x4983/7190
Appointment Line .................................................. (803) 647-5829
........................................................................... (800) 293-8262
Billing and Insurance
  Collections – pay a bill ........................................... (888) 827-4817
  General questions ............................................... (866) 258-2772
  Medical claims .................................................... (803) 776-4000 x6763
Chaplain Services
  8 a.m. to 4 p.m. .................................................. (803) 776-4000 x6332
  After hours ....................................................... (803) 776-4000
Compensation and Pension ..................................... (803) 776-4000 x6183
Enrollment Eligibility .......................................... (803) 776-4000 x7010
Information Desk (Dorn VAMC) ........................... (803) 776-4000 x4719/5580
Medical Records .................................................. (803) 776-4000 x6283
MyHealthVet ......................................................... (803) 695-6783
Patient Advocate ................................................... (803) 776-4000 x7998/6937
Prosthetics ............................................................ (803) 776-4000 x6323
Optometry (Eye Clinic) ......................................... (803) 776-4000 x5122
Release of Information ......................................... (803) 776-4000 x6290
Shuttle Service ..................................................... (803) 776-4000 x6780
Telephone Advice Line
  Outside Columbia ............................................... (888) 651-2683
  In Columbia ....................................................... (803) 647-5829
Travel Office ......................................................... (803) 776-4000 x4483/4525/4484
Veteran’s Transportation Service .......................... (803) 776-4000 x6398
Veteran Service Organizations
  American Legion ................................................ (803) 776-4000 x7539
  AmVets ............................................................ (803) 776-4000 x2421
  Disabled American Veterans ............................... (803) 776-4000 x2422
  Military Order of the Purple Heart ....................... (803) 776-4000 x2430
  Paralyzed Veterans Association ........................... (803) 776-4000 x2432
  Veteran’s of Foreign Wars ................................. (803) 776-4000 x2443
Voluntary Services ................................................ (803) 776-4000 x6780/7081

Community-Base Outpatient Clinics

Anders CBOC
3030 N. Hwy 81
Anderson, SC 29621
Tele (864) 224-5450

Greenville OPC
41 Park Creek Drive
Greenville, SC 29605
Tele (864) 299-1600

Spartanburg CBOC
279 North Grove Medical Plaza
Spartanburg, SC 29303
Tele (864) 582-7025

Florence CBOC
1822 Sally Hill Farms Blvd
Florence, SC 29501
Tele (843) 292-8383

Sumter CBOC
407 N. Salem Ave
Sumter, SC 29150
Tele (803) 938-9901

Orangeburg CBOC
1767 Village Park Drive
Orangeburg, SC 29118
(803) 533-1335

Rock Hill CBOC
2670 Mills Park Drive
Rock Hill, SC 29732
Tele (803) 366-4848

Comments / Suggestions for the Palmetto Post

This newsletter is a product of the Dorn VAMC Public Affairs Office. Any questions, concerns, comments or suggestions should be directed to Bob Hall at (803) 776-4000 x 6519 or by email to vhacmsdornpa@va.gov.

The Palmetto Post is designed to keep South Carolina’s Veterans informed about the health care and services provided by the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center and its seven community-based outpatient clinics.

This is your newsletter. So suggestions on the information you’d like to see in this newsletter are most welcome. Keep in mind, space is limited as this is only a monthly newsletter, so not all suggestions will be granted.

Submit your comments or suggestions to vhacmsdornpa@va.gov.

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