

United States Senate

January 16, 2018

The Honorable David J. Shulkin
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
Washington, District of Columbia 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

I write to you regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implementation of a new electronic health records system with the Cerner Corporation. This past June, it was welcome news when you took swift action to align VA with the Department of Defense (DoD) in an effort to build an interoperable electronic health record system between the two Departments. Yet, VA's inconsistent messages regarding the urgency of finalizing the contract and willingness to give up on your own self-imposed timeline raises concern. Additionally, an apparent lack of understanding regarding the commercially available interoperability capabilities led to your request for further assessment of the contract and an anticipated one-month delay in implementation. This pattern of equivocation, on the new electronic health record system and other VA matters of significance, is frustrating.

During a November 15, 2017, hearing before the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, you testified that the VA was able to leverage "substantial savings in efficiencies and timelines" benefitting from DoD's experience and the Department's investment modernizing its electronic health record system with Cerner. You also stated in this hearing that delays in moving forward with implementation of the contract could put those savings and efficiencies at risk. For example, further delay disrupts your implementation plan that requires 900 Cerner IP engineers to support the VA's deployment of the system in the Pacific Northwest. Unless you finalize the contract this month, there will be a considerable shift within Cerner to reassign these 900 IP engineers to other projects, which will be difficult to reset or recommit to this contract in the future. It is unclear how you intend to mitigate deviations from the VA's plan developed with Cerner.

I want to make certain the VA still intends to adhere to previously stated goals seeking savings and efficiencies with Cerner and make the most of American taxpayer provided funds by deploying the new electronic health records system with DoD as scheduled. I request information and answers to the following:

1. Please provide the Mitre-produced report assessing the interoperability needs of the VA and the contract with Cerner.
2. Is the VA seeking changes to the Cerner contract or developing plans for an alternate solution as a result of the Mitre report? What new or additional steps, if any, will occur as a result of the Mitre report?

3. Finally, if the Cerner contract is not finalized this month, please explain the consequences. What “substantial savings in efficiencies and timelines” will be lost? Without the 900 IP Cerner engineers as VA had previously planned, how does the VA plan to reset or replace this capacity and capability, and at what cost?

Getting this new electronic health record right is of utmost importance. VA needs an electronic health record solution that provides the health information necessary for veterans to receive excellent care and enables clinicians to be able to deliver it.

Thank you for your prompt attention to my concerns and request for information

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran
United States Senator