



From Dial Up to Dialed In - VA Expands Electronic Health Care with Secure Messaging for Veterans

Burson-Marsteller and Sage Communications and Department of Veterans Affairs, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Marketing Consumer Services — Health Care Services

< BR>To meet the mission of providing exceptional health care for Veterans, VA developed tools such as My Health eVet, an online personal health record. With the pilot launch of a new My Health eVet interactive feature, Secure Messaging, scheduled for June 2012, VA needed to find a cost-effective way to increase awareness and enrollment of Veterans in the new feature. The Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Office of Informatics and Analytics (OIA) developed an integrated marketing plan that delivered powerful messages to Veterans through their primary point-of-care. As a result, My Health eVet enrollment increased **42%** and upgrades to Secure Messaging increased **271%**.

Marketing consumer services includes programs designed to introduce new services or promote existing services to a consumer audience.

Full Text: **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) operates the nation's largest integrated health care system, with more than 1,700 hospitals, clinics, community living centers, readjustment counseling centers and other facilities with 8.7 million Veterans enrolled for care. To meet the mission of providing exceptional health care for Veterans, VHA has developed a number of health care services, products and tools. My Health eVet is one of these tools. It is VA's online Personal Health Record, offering Veterans a portal to access their self-entered personal and VA medical history, refill VA prescriptions and track their health goals. While many Veterans use My Health eVet to review and print health records, new features that allow Veterans to take a more active role in their health care were relatively unknown to Veterans and therefore under-utilized. As such, VHA piloted a program to increase enrollment in Secure Messaging, a secure and convenient tool for Veterans to communicate with their health care team between visits, scheduled for June 2012. VHA's Office of Informatics and Analytics (OIA) was tasked with developing a cost-effective communications program to increase Veteran participation by encouraging existing users to upgrade to Secure Messaging and enrolling non-users in My Health eVet and Secure Messaging at once.

RESEARCH

VHA's OIA conducted primary and secondary research to better understand the patient community and the current perception of My Health eVet.

A literature review of surveys, such as a Stanford University survey, the National eHealth Collaborative stakeholder survey, the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and reviews of My Health eVet, found that Veteran patients who used My Health eVet had a strong affinity for the tool. They were eager for more features, particularly if the features gave them greater control of their health care. Interviews with onsite My Health eVet coordinators indicated

that Veterans were often signing up for My Health eVet at their appointments at VHA medical facilities, rather than on their own time at their home computer. As such, the health care providers interacting with Veterans at facilities would be well-positioned to serve as primary message carriers and advocates for enrollment.

Primary research, conducted through VHA stakeholder interviews and questionnaires, also indicated that these health care professionals believed they needed additional information on the value of My Health eVet and Secure Messaging to effectively engage their Veteran patients. VHA health care providers expressed interest in having a set of nationally approved communications materials to facilitate dialog with Veterans. Their feedback indicated that materials should focus on the benefits of Secure Messaging and provide step-by-step instructions for enrollment and upgrading to Secure Messaging.

Guided by these findings, OIA Communications utilized an existing contract with Burson-Marsteller and Sage Communications to develop a communications plan that increased awareness of the new feature and provided collateral materials to providers at five VHA medical facilities – Overton Brooks VA Medical Center (Shreveport, La.), VA Roseburg Healthcare System (Roseburg, Ore.), Jesse Brown VA Medical Center (Chicago, Ill.), VA Salt Lake City Health Care System (Salt Lake City, Utah) and Miami VA Healthcare System (Miami, Fla.) – chosen to participate in the Secure Messaging technology pilot program.

PLANNING

The team's primary objective was to increase Veteran enrollment in My Health eVet and Secure Messaging at the five pilot site locations, which would then justify a national campaign to enroll Veterans in Secure Messaging. To accomplish these goals within the parameters of the contract and a limited budget for media relations, OIA and Burson-Marsteller/Sage team developed a communications plan that delivered powerful messages to Veterans through their primary point of care, which was shown to be the most effective and efficient way to deliver information.

The plan:

- Identified key audiences: There were two primary audiences. Providers were both an important audience and a purveyor for the messages and information to the Veteran audience.
- Identified key messages mapped against those audiences: OIA developed several messaging platforms for the Secure Messaging campaign and tested key messages among providers. The following message was determined to be the most effective: "My Health eVet and Secure Messaging are putting health care in the hands of Veteran patients."
- Developed a strategy and tactics for enabling providers to encourage Veterans to enroll and to increase awareness of the new feature among Veterans: OIA performed a full-scale inventory of existing tools and tactics (e.g., videos, fact sheets, brochures) currently in use to promote My Health eVet. The OIA team then worked with providers to assess what communications materials would be the most effective for health care providers to encourage enrollment. The team then developed a training schedule for providers to learn the messages; a production schedule to develop copy and designs for the final toolkit of materials for providers and Veterans and a supplemental media campaign to increase awareness, including a targeted traditional radio campaign in pilot news markets, a custom Facebook tab and content for digital media to be used by staff at the pilot sites.

EXECUTION

The team developed a regimented calendar for development, production and distribution.

Phase One: Development and Training: April – May 2012: The pilot project engaged staff through educational offerings, including Secure Messaging workbooks, online video and training sessions. Concurrently, OIA worked with Burson/Sage to draft copy and design materials for the Secure Messaging campaign. Materials included:

- Letters to encourage enrollment in My Health^eVet and opt-in to Secure Messaging;
- Postcard to remind patients of their clinic appointment(s) with a call-to-action to complete authentication;
- Email reminder to visit the clinic for their appointment(s) with a call-to-action to complete authentication;
- General brochure about My Health^eVet with instructions on how to register;
- Phone tents for display at facilities outlining the enrollment process;
- Posters for facilities displaying the enrollment process;
- Toolkit of materials of fact sheets inside a custom-made folder; and
- Digital content including a custom-designed video, site-specific Facebook tabs, Twitter content calendars, VHA blog posts, and web banners.

Phase Two: Production/Engagement: May 2012: The OIA team worked with health care providers to refine content and revise messages to best engage Veterans. Final items for distribution were prepared to be printed professionally and at desktop printers. All items were made 508 compliant to meet federal standards to make the materials accessible to people with disabilities. Fact sheets, posters, postcards, brochures and the video script were translated into Spanish.

Phase Three: Distribution/Action: June 2012: By June 1, all pilot sites had received printed toolkits, letters and brochures. The internal VHA Sharepoint page was posted, which allowed providers to download all materials and print on-site. The external OIA website – ehealth.va.gov – was updated with new information on Secure Messaging, the brochure and the video. Internal blog posts and e-news blasts were distributed within VHA to increase awareness and pave the way for the expanded national enrollment campaign.

EVALUATION

The pilot program met the stated objective: Veterans at all five pilot sites enrolled in My Health^eVet and Secure Messaging at greater rates than non-pilot sites during the June 2012 campaign.

- At all five pilot sites, panels showed steady increases in enrollment and upgrades during the month-long pilot program; for example, the Roseburg Healthcare Center saw an increase of over **380 opt-ins** in that month alone and Miami Healthcare System had the highest overall registrations and enrollments in the nation.
- The success of the pilot program exceeded VHA expectations and **led to the deployment of a national campaign** to promote Secure Messaging in the fall of 2012. The national campaign used the materials developed in the pilot program and the internal website to share information across all VHA facilities.
- As a result of this national campaign, new My Health^eVet enrollment was up **42 percent** over Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 and upgrades to Secure Messaging increased **271 percent** over FY 11.