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AHLTA: I Hear You

Posted by: [George Peach Taylor Jr., M.D., M.P.H.](#) | [Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs](#)

Monday, September 13, 2010

I've been on both sides of AHLTA: on the DoD side during initial deployment in the early 2000s and on the contractor side in 2008-09. So I wanted to write this note sooner rather than later.

I hear you. I really do. Yes, AHLTA has often been a five-letter word. I even have one of those patches with AHLTA crossed out like a "no parking" sign. Leaders have creatively called it "a John Deere tractor on the information superhighway." I actually think its closer to "an Escalade on the Washington Beltway at rush hour." There's truth in both. But it is what it is, and this is where I am starting from today.

First, I am continuing to press for (and monitor) the ongoing improvements in the stability, performance, and capabilities of today's system. By this, I mean bettering the application that sits on your desktop or nearby server (which is roughly the size of Microsoft Word), improving the standardization and performance of the servers in your military treatment facility that serve as "mid-tier," and ensuring that the Central Data Repository (CDR) is stable and capable. As important is the attention paid to the myriad of the connections between your system to the CDR and back through the local firewalls and across the globe. AHLTA is no simple system. But the plain fact is that our feet have left the diving board. There is just no going back to paper now. But I have work to do on what you see on your screen every day.

Secondly, I am closely involved in what can be best described as the Electronic Health Record Way Ahead. There is an evolving Center of Excellence being put together which will lead to the fielding of the next generation of clinical electronic systems. As AHLTA continues to (slowly) improve, I will be able to speak more clearly very soon about the kinds of systems that are in our future, and how we plan to get there from where we are today. Beyond the care for our wounded warriors, there is no larger issue for me personally than getting this done correctly.

Thirdly, I need your help. AHLTA will be with us for a while. I need to make sure that we are balancing the investments in improving what you see every day with what is spent in the next generation systems. In the meantime, I ask that you continue to learn how to best insert and leverage AHLTA in your practice on behalf of our patients. Each of the services is responsible for fielding new updates and training you on their use. I urge you to take advantage of the advanced classes that each service has wisely created. For those older providers (like me), listen to the younger generation who are coming out of their training having grown up only in electronic medical records.

And make no mistake...I will continue to listen to you. I feel your pain.

George Peach Taylor, Jr., MD, MPH
Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs