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# Two JHQVAMC Use Cases Win in Robots with Benefits Competition

MOUNTAIN HOME, Tenn.— Two James H. Quillen VA Medical Center (JHQVAMC) robotic use case submissions won separate categories in the Robots with Benefits virtual competition sponsored by Veterans Benefits Administration's Business Automation Office and the Office of Information and Technology Robotics Process Automation Center of Excellence held Feb. 1, 2022.

Staff members at JHQVAMC developed the COVID-19 Positive Test Notification (CPTN) and the Encounter Action Required Reporting (EARR) robots in partnership with CGI Federal and IBM, respectively. CPTN won the award for best value, while EARR was deemed the overall competition winner.

Veterans Benefits Administration partnered with robotics companies Ibility and UiPath to host the competition during which competitors utilized Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to build software robots aimed at automating manual processes.

Software robots—instead of people—do repetitive and lower-value work, such as logging into applications and systems; moving files and folders; extracting, copying, and inserting data; filling in forms; and completing routine analyses and reports. Advanced robots can even perform cognitive processes, like interpreting text, engaging in chats and conversations, understanding unstructured data, and applying advanced machine learning models to make complex decisions.

"When robots do these types of repetitive, high-volume tasks, humans are freed to focus on the things they do best and to enjoy more innovating, collaborating, creating, and interacting with customers," said Kerwin Fulton, Group Practice Manager at JHQVAMC. "Enterprises get a boost, too, through higher productivity, efficiency, and resilience. It's no wonder that RPA is rewriting the story of work."

At JHQVAMC and across Veterans Health Administration, the robots will give employees more time to serve Veterans' needs, said Heather Brewer, Chief Health Informatics Officer at JHQVAMC.

"VA has many processes which are highly manual in nature," said Brewer. "The processes that we automated using RPA are vastly scalable and would be easily shared with the entire VA network."

Brewer, who helped develop the EARR robot, said the notification process was designed to decrease instances of incomplete documentation by efficiently notifying the proper staff to clear any errors. The existing system requires staff to manually pull a report, import data into Microsoft Excel, format the report, and then email it. She said the recipient list contains over 200 staff who must process the information before sending it to end users for disposition.

"The 'bot' will do all of those steps without human intervention," said Brewer. "Because this process is automated, the 'bot' forwards additional information to the user helping identify the issues. The old process did not," she added.

Michael Leek, a program analyst at JHQVAMC, worked to develop the CPTN robot, which helps initiate timely notification of positive COVID tests for employees. Earlier notification of positive tests helps the medical center's infection control by automatically providing information so that measures can be taken as quickly as possible, helping prevent the spread of COVID-19 to other staff and patients.

The CPTN initiative was an interdisciplinary effort that included Monica Brase, Infection Control Coordinator, and COVID-19 Contact Tracing Providers, Steffan Chase and Christal Whitehead.

Leek said the staff members who developed both projects worked under the direction of Dr. David Hecht, Chief of Staff at JHQVAMC. He said Dr. Hecht's guidance, encouragement and leadership gave these robotic initiatives the needed support for success, both within the VA healthcare system and as winners in the Robots with Benefits competition.

In the case of both robots, Brewer and Leek designed the processes, produced prototypes, and provided necessary code to the CGI Federal and IBM teams, who took the processes and made several enhancements.

Brewer and the IBM team that created EARR are scheduled to present its robot during a live robot demonstration that will take place in Washington later this year, but a date has not yet been set.

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