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News Release

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VA Medical Imaging Reaches Record Level

WASHINGTON -- VistA Imaging, the medical and health care imaging system used in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, attained over one billion stored images in January this year, according to the department.

“Using this technology, VA has established an unprecedented number of medical images in its database, allowing VA physicians immediate access to patient records regardless of their location,” said Dr. Gerald Cross, VA’s acting under secretary for health, said. “Our Veterans don’t have to wait for hospital staff to find x-rays or make comparisons between a patient’s past and current records.”

The imaging system captures clinical images, scanned documents, motion video and other non-text data, and makes them part of the patient's electronic record.

In the course of serving 1.2 million patients a month, VA stores 20-25 million images in the VistA Imaging system. In 2009, a total of 290 million are expected to be stored. Storage space used today is approximately one pedabyte -- one million gigabytes.

Using digital images makes remote diagnosis and treatment possible and permits in-home monitoring of some patients’ conditions. It eliminates travel for patients needing follow-up care and makes services available in medically underserved areas.

Storing images on magnetic and optical disks provides both long-term access and recovery in disasters. Following Hurricane Katrina in 2006, 5.4 million VA images -- nearly 100 percent -- were recovered from VistA Imaging at the New Orleans VA Medical Center, even though the optical servers had been underwater. These images could be viewed remotely from any VA site and that capability enabled VA to continue providing treatment to Veterans displaced by Katrina when they visited another VA facility.

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VA Medical Imaging 2/2/2

VistA Imaging first became operational in 1990 at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center to handle radiology, and in 1999, VA spread its use to all VA medical centers. The system and its leadership have been recognized with awards and published articles since 1993.

More than 7.8 million Veterans are enrolled in the VA health care system.

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