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VA Announces Blue Button Prize Competition

Offers Incentive for Private Sector PHR Adoption

Washington - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today it is offering a \$50,000 prize to the first team that builds a personal health record (PHR) using the Blue Button? download format, and arranges to install the PHR on the websites of 25,000 physicians across America. Sponsored by the VA Innovation Initiative (VAi2), the Blue Button Prize Competition is open to all U.S. organizations and individuals. The contest starts on July 18.

"Over six million Veterans who receive health care from VA can already download their personal health data using the Blue Button," said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. "We want to be sure the 17 million Veterans who receive care from non-VA doctors and hospitals can do the same."

VA first offered Blue Button downloads through its My HealtheVet website in August, 2010; since then nearly 300,000 Veterans have downloaded their PHR data, including upcoming appointments at a VA Medical Center, medications, allergies, health reminders and, in a recent upgrade, their laboratory results.

The Department of Defense also provides Blue Button download capabilities to its TRICARE beneficiaries, and Medicare beneficiaries can download their claims histories using the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Blue Button functions.

"Veterans can now expect that downloading their data will be a routine part of the care they receive from VA," said White House Chief Technology Officer Aneesh Chopra. "We want Veterans across America – and the general public – to think of Blue Button downloads as something they receive from their family doctors as a routine matter."

Getting a low-cost user-friendly application into hands of physicians is a key part of the competition, according to VA Chief Technology Officer Peter L. Levin.

"Moving health data can and should be safe, simple and inexpensive," Levin said. "Blue Button technology is all of those things. Doctors who use PHRs developed as part of this competition can give their patients the ability to keep and control their own health data. Blue Button's simple format can even support patient-authorized health data transfers to other doctors or hospitals."

The Blue Button Prize Competition is sponsored by the VA Innovation Initiative (VAi2). VAi2 is a department-wide program that solicits the most promising innovations from VA employees, the private sector, non-profits, and academia to increase Veterans' access to VA services, improve the quality of services delivered, enhance the performance of VA operations, and delivering of those services more efficient. Through prize contests, private sector innovators help improve federal government operations and technology developed using tax dollars is made readily available to the public.

Qualifying PHRs must be easily installed by physicians and other clinical professionals, must be readily available to all of the physicians' patients, and must allow patients to download their data using VA's Blue Button's simple text-based format – which can be read and printed on any computer without using special software.

Contemporary PHRs are designed to address consumer health information needs by enabling individuals to access, manage, and share their personal health information in a private and secure environment. The meaningful use of technologies such as PHRs has the potential to improve health care processes and outcomes. The PHRs must also meet data-security requirements. The contest will run through October 18, 2011, unless a winner is declared sooner.

Contest rules are available at <http://challenge.gov/VAi2/198-blue-button-for-all-americans>.

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