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VA Open Application Programming Interface Pledge Gains Momentum to Shape a New Direction for Health Care

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that to further accelerate the benefits of the VA Open Application Programming Interface (API) pledge, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin has asked Dr. Rasu Shrestha, chief innovation officer at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, to lead the initiative.

"I am excited to see this vision become a reality, and am actively seeking other health-care systems to join our pledge, and ask developers to take part in our Lighthouse Lab, so we can shape a new direction for health care together," Shulkin said.

Shulkin announced the pledge March 9 at the annual Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society Conference in Las Vegas, where 11 health-care providers initially signed up to partner with VA. To date, several additional institutions have expressed interest in joining the pledge.

The API pledge encourages health-care providers to commit to work collaboratively with VA to increase the mapping pace of health data to industry standards, including the current and future versions of Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR).

Considered the "front door" to VA's vast data stores, Lighthouse is the department's application programming interface management platform, and functions similar to a waiter's role in a restaurant — the critical link communicating orders to the "kitchen." For VA, the kitchen is the system that will prepare the order then deliver it back to the waiter, or API.

The coalition effort includes key stakeholders across the industry to elevate electronic health record (EHR) interoperability and realize the potential of the Open API Pledge to accelerate the design, testing and implementation of the Argonaut Project implementation guides of the FHIR API.

Shrestha added, "There is no moment greater than now for the industry to step up and make their voices heard to push towards real and meaningful interoperability. This is an important moment for the private sector to answer the Secretary's call and work with our vendors to make information flow and use as freely accessible as possible to make care safer and better for Veterans."

Pledgees will meet for the first roundtable discussion in April and commit to working with VA and standards community to implement the existing Argonaut implementation guides. The organizations will participate in testing draft specifications for scheduling, clinical notes, questionnaire and encounters, as well as implement access standards for Veterans, clinicians and the care teams that serve them.

Stephen Klasko, president and CEO of Thomas Jefferson University and Jefferson Health and current pledgee, said, "Just as our Veterans deserve the best technology when they are defending our country, they deserve the best health-care technology when they return. Dr. Shulkin's leadership in assembling the open API pledge is not only important for Veterans but is an important first step in creating seamless electronic records for all U.S. citizens."

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