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Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
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VA, Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation deliver cancer care to Veterans via teleoncology

Multimillion-dollar grant to help reach Veterans in rural areas

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced it is teaming with the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation (Foundation) to build new programs to enable VA oncology specialists to provide Veterans access to [precision cancer care](#) regardless of where they live.

The Foundation has committed to providing VA \$4.5 million in grant funds over three years to help establish a national teleoncology center to more effectively reach Veterans living in rural communities.

The VA Center for Strategic Partnerships facilitated the grant, which will utilize VA's telehealth infrastructure allowing Veterans access to teleoncology platforms under the Foundation's Global Cancer Disparities Initiative. This will offer genetic counseling to Veterans who undergo sequencing and afford Veteran oncology patients a range of potentially life-saving clinical trials — even if they live a distance away from a VA medical center. Veterans enrolled in VA health care are two and a half times more likely to live in rural areas where access to specialty care is limited.

“Delivering innovative solutions through virtual care technologies is vital,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The VA-Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation partnership will build on the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) recent telehealth expansion to establish a leading-edge hub for teleoncology which will serve as a model for oncology specialists in every health care system.”

The program will support the delivery of best-in-class care, education and practice in collaboration with VHA's existing precision oncology initiative which has had dramatic impacts for some Veterans and will now be available to all Veterans with advanced cancer.

“The Foundation will work with VA to accelerate the growth of teleoncology,” said Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation President John L. Damonti. “By developing, implementing and standardizing workflow processes, this project will expedite the expansion of a model for delivering specialized oncology care in a virtual setting — and help cancer care teams provide the utmost patient experience in a virtual care environment.” The Foundation's grant will also be used to create a human centered design training program.

Leaders from Bristol Myers Squibb, Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation and VHA will launch the program at the America Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) annual meeting. During the ASCO20 virtual education program, August 8-10, they will share individual capabilities and discuss how collaboration is improving cancer care for the nation's military Veteran patient population.

“As an oncologist and a veteran of the Army, I welcome the support provided by this grant,” said ASCO President Howard A. “Skip” Burris III, MD, FACP, FASCO. “VA's leadership in telehealth will be shared with the broader oncology community.”

The teleoncology program paves the way for VA and the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation to enhance the capabilities of [VA Video Connect](#), a platform that allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA health care teams on any computer, tablet or mobile device with an internet connection. VA Video Connect is one of the largest and most successful digital health platforms in the nation and is currently responsible for conducting more than 20,000 virtual appointments each day.

Veterans interested in VA's teleoncology services should consult with their VA health care team. For more information about VA telehealth, visit [connected care](#).

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