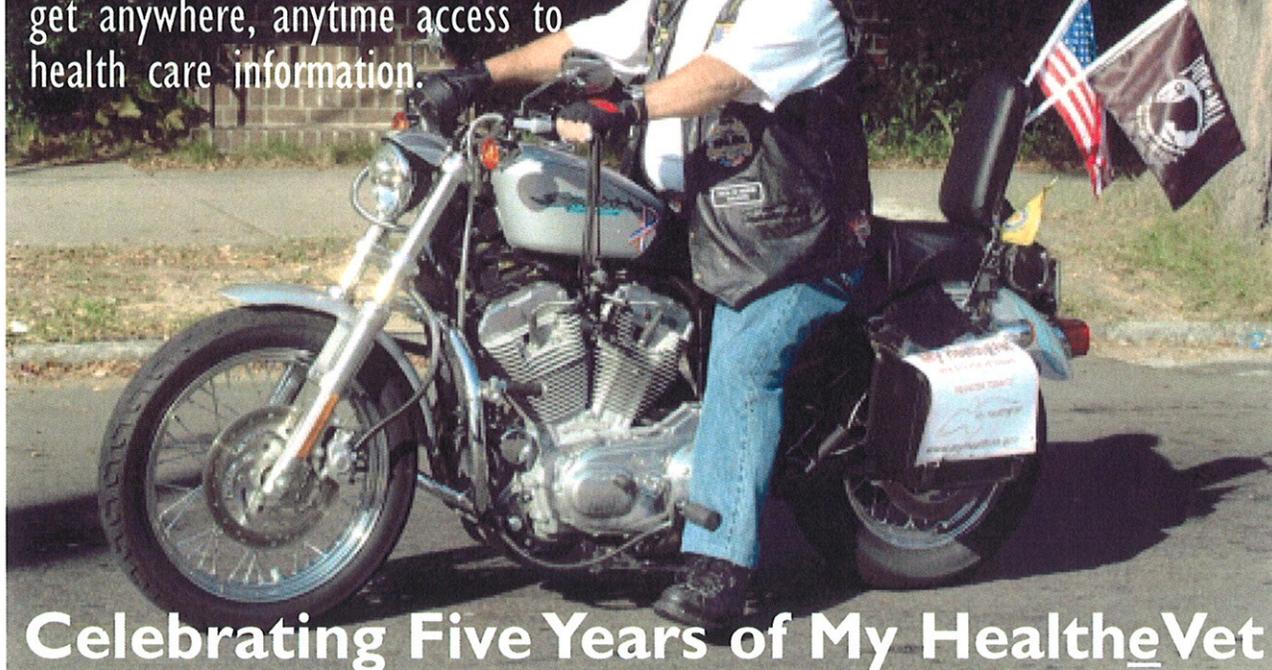


More than 500,000 users are now registered on the Web health portal, where they can get anywhere, anytime access to health care information.

Vietnam veteran and volunteer Melvin Marks is a champion of My Health_Vet at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, S.C.



Celebrating Five Years of My Health_Vet

CHRIS BAROODY

Pioneering. Innovative. Ambitious. Award-winning. All words used to describe VA's personal health record, My Health_Vet, a Web health portal launched nationwide on Veterans Day 2003. Celebrating its fifth anniversary this year, My Health_Vet will expand a number of features to enhance patient-provider relationships and continue integrating into VHA's much-lauded electronic health record.

More than access to online health information and a gateway to online benefits and services, My Health_Vet enhances veterans' communication with their primary health care team and allows them to become active partners in their health care. With more than 500,000 users now registered at www.myhealth.va.gov, it is clear that the integration of features like online VA prescription refills—which tops searches on www.va.gov—

access to health measurements and a one-stop shop for VA benefits, anywhere, anytime Internet access to VA health care improves patient satisfaction and enhances quality health care.

My Health_Vet currently contains data entered by health care consumers, both veterans and employees, who have harnessed the power of online access to health care information. As VA celebrates five years of online access, veterans can look forward to accessing key portions of the electronic health record, extracted and integrated securely into the patient's personal health record. In the near future, patients will be able to delegate access to one or all parts of the record to another person (such as a health care provider, family member or advocate).

"With the 2008 enhancements to My Health_Vet, America's veterans,

their caretakers and caregivers will soon have access to personal, secure, convenient and informed personal health information not only to improve their health but to become partners in their health care as well," said VA Secretary Dr. James B. Peake.

My Health_Vet has begun testing "secure messaging," providing almost anywhere, anytime Internet access to VA health care staff, at VA medical centers in Boston, Bay Pines, Fla., Portland, Ore., and Washington, D.C. This new online tool will allow registered My Health_Vet users who have gone through the in-person authentication process (IPA) at a local VA facility to correspond directly with their primary health care provider teams.

With secure messaging, registered patients with an IPA, or upgraded My Health_Vet account, will not only communicate non-urgent and non-emergent issues with their health care

provider teams, their online conversations have the potential to integrate into their existing electronic health record, which health care providers see as part of VA's Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS). "Our goal is to increase the number of veterans with an IPA VHA-wide this year so they can get the full benefit of their online personal health record," said VA Undersecretary for Health Dr. Michael J. Kussman.

Secure messaging is expected to be released nationally during the year with a strategic, integrated and incremental approach, according to My Health_eVet Program Director Theresa Hancock, with VHA's Office of Information. "That's why we encourage all veterans, their caregivers and care providers to register by completing

the in-person authentication process at their local VA medical center or outpatient clinic, and watch for additional announcements of this exciting new feature," said Hancock.

But don't take her word for it. Veterans like Melvin Marks know firsthand that My Health_eVet is "... about living my life." As a dedicated volunteer at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, S.C., the Navy veteran supports My Health_eVet by helping to spread the word as he processes ID cards for fellow veterans. Marks assists in processing approximately 30 to 40 in-person authentication registrations per month.

A Vietnam veteran, he acknowledges that World War II veterans have some trouble getting started

with the username and password set up, but after that, they are self-sufficient. His generation and younger veterans are more comfortable with computers and have an easier start at the registration process.

"The IPA registration is key to all the features My Health_eVet can provide," said Marks. "With IPA registration, you get full access to health calendars, your own information, and soon lab information and even messaging with your health care team."

Marks personally uses My Health_eVet to order his medications each month, which helps him instruct other veterans. He also uses the graphing functions for his high blood pressure, pain and diabetes.

He printed out the diabetes chart to take to his doctor, who adjusted his medication to eliminate the peaks and valleys in the blood sugar readings. Now, Marks' blood sugar remains fairly normal.

Marks has even become part of the local My Health_eVet "road show." Susan Haidary, the My Health_eVet point of contact at the facility, takes him along to new employee and patient orientations, as well as service-level briefings on My Health_eVet.

Marks recently prepared a presentation for nurses using My Health_eVet's online library of health information. "Melvin is definitely a key champion at Charleston and the Savannah CBOC, and he also helps train physicians on My Health_eVet," said Haidary.

From veterans and volunteers to the network of My Health_eVet points of contact throughout VHA, the portal owes its success to innovation, communication and collaboration.

"I've been a user of the My Health_eVet 'pilot' for quite some time," said Geoffrey S. Parker, of Dunkirk, Md. "I am still impressed with the access it provides to my health records and other information." **VA**

By Stacie M. Rivera

Some Reminders

- Web site visitors may access patient health education content through the site's evidence-based health information libraries without registering or logging in.
- My Health_eVet registration is required before users can access additional program features. Initial registration is accomplished using a Web-based form on the site, and complex passwords are required to safeguard user information. Once registered, users have access to self-entered information features such as health journals and health e-logs.
- To enable the inclusion of personally identifiable health information from the electronic health record, "heavy proofing" is required through in-person authentication (IPA). To accomplish this level of authentication, veterans must present at a VA facility or VA-designated location and display a photo ID or a new Veterans Identification Card (VIC). Valid photo ID may include a driver's license, passport or other government ID.

My Health_eVet registration then initiates a transactional process to match the user's information with the VA Master Patient Index (MPI), using the Social Security number as a key identifier. This matching is critical to connect the patient to functions like prescription refill (which is available now) and health information extracts (which will be available later this year). VA medical centers that have satellite clinics are encouraged to ensure that staff members are available to perform IPA at the clinic.

