



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

News Release

Charles George VA Medical Center
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Charles George VAMC rolls out secure messaging

CHARLES GEORGE VA MEDICAL CENTER, Asheville, N.C. – The Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville has implemented a new technology within VA’s My HealtheVet Web site that allows Veterans to communicate directly with healthcare teams on line.

The system, called Secure Messaging, promotes a partnership between patients and their healthcare team by providing an additional communication method that is convenient, flexible, and available 24 hours a day.

“This safe and secure web-based system allows VA patients and their healthcare teams to communicate non-urgent, health related information in a private and safe computer environment,” said Dr. Walter Martin, facility champion for Secure Messaging.

All primary care physicians and nurses at the VA Medical Center in Asheville and community based outpatient clinics in Rutherfordton and Franklin, N.C., will soon be using this new service Martin explained. Following primary care, the service will expand to mental health and specialty clinics so that Veterans can have secure e-mail access to all their healthcare providers he said.

By using Secure Messaging, VA patients can request appointments, prescription renewals, and ask routine health or administrative questions. The system also reduces the number of telephone calls and time spent waiting on hold.

“Secure Messaging has been a tremendous improvement in the way I communicate with my doctor and nurses,” says Veteran Russell Johnson. “Whenever I think of a question or concern, I can now e-mail my doctor anytime of the day or night and know that they will respond. They are quick too!”

VA employees are required to respond to Secure Messages from Veterans within three business days and the Charles George VA Medical Center has an exceptional response rate. Veterans routinely get a response within one business day and 96 percent of all messages are responded to within three days. Many of the nurses are excited about the new system and the advantages it provides. “Our team loves Secure Messaging. Our team usually answers Veteran’s messages as soon as they come in. We can share information with our Veterans much faster than before,” said Licensed Practical Nurse Andrea Speer. “A Veteran can ask for a test result and instead of playing telephone tag or sending a letter, we can securely give them the information they need right away.”

Doctor Martin also touts the integration of Secure Messaging with clinical workflow. “As with phone call and voice messages, patients often send us questions or concerns that we need to address. But unlike phone conversations where we have to chart our interactions, Secure Messaging gives us the ability to save our electronic conversations directly to the patient’s charts. This saves time and provides for better record keeping in patient care.”

Secure Messaging is open to all Veterans treated at the Charles George VA Medical Center and its community based outpatient clinics. Veterans must be enrolled in the My HealtheVet program

and be in-person authenticated to take part. Veterans may enroll in My HealtheVet and Secure Messaging by visiting the Charles George VA Medical Center or at the outpatient clinics in Rutherfordton (374 Charlotte Rd., (828) 288-2780), and Franklin (647 Wayah St., (828) 369-1781), N.C.. Additional information is available by contacting Randy McCracken at (828) 298-7911 Ext. 3511 or by e-mail at Randy.McCracken@va.gov

Secure Messaging is a nation-wide service of the My HealtheVet program for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Launched in 2003, My HealtheVet is the VA's on-line personal health record program located at: www.myhealth.va.gov