

VA Hospital and Other Updates

Some of you may have recognized the column from last week as a reprint, it was. Last week, I experienced the VA health care system first-hand, not by choice. First and foremost, the care I received at the VA hospital in Tucson, AZ was excellent. I was at the hospital with an infection about a month ago, got some meds, took them and the infection went away. Well, it came back and the doctors decided to keep me overnight and make sure the meds worked this time. I am not a very happy hospital patient, but the staff, doctors, RNs, techs were all super. I even had three doctors checking on me, one male and two females. The end result is that I am back home and on the recovery road. I won't give details of the infection, just let me say I spent a lot of time in the bathroom.

Today, I went to the newly redesigned VA website – va.gov and am happy with the result of their work. The old website was somewhat difficult to navigate. The aspect I like most is how simple the front page is, it has no slideshow of photos, it has letter from the Director nor other things that are really self-promotions. The home page has four boxes; Health care, Disability, Education and Records which are the items most of us need. The Health care options are prescriptions, send a message, schedule an appointment, view lab and test results and apply for benefits. Most hospitals now have a secure portal where a patient can manage their records, the VA does also and have made it much easier to sign in or create an account. I'm pleased. The VA also has kiosks where you can check in with your VA card, another nice option. I'm still disappointed in some of the old 'back office' software and a non-centralized database, but that will come.

On 5 March President Trump signed an executive order to address Veterans suicide. This is overdue and is a national emergency. The executive order mandates the establishment of the Veteran Wellness, Empowerment and Suicide Prevention Task Force. The task force will include the Secretaries of Defense, Health and Human Services, Energy, Homeland Security, Labor, Education and Housing and Urban Development, as well as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. Over the next year, yes, 365 days, the task force shall develop a roadmap to lower effectively the rate of Veterans suicide, propose to Congress a grant program for local communities and develop a national research strategy conduct research on Veterans suicide prevention. This crisis has been with us a long time and needs to be addressed. I'm very concerned over the number of Veterans we will lose while the task force meets.