



Romanyk Consulting

Focusing on what matters

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"The Focus"

Volume1, Issue 3

The VA – A Vision for the Future; a Mission for All Time

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

The mission of The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is indeed a sacred trust, and in his address to Congress on February 24th, 2009, President Obama honored our nation's military men and women and pledged to uphold that trust by extending our veterans' health care and benefits:



"As we meet here tonight, our men and women in uniform stand watch abroad and more are readying to deploy. To each and every one of them, and to the families who bear the quiet burden of their absence, Americans are united in sending one message: We honor your service, we are inspired by your sacrifice, and you have our unyielding support.

"And to keep our sacred trust with those who serve, we will raise their pay, and give our veterans the expanded health care and benefits that they have earned." 1

The President's words are cause for both inspiration and motivation. Inspiration - because the VA was established and exists yet today on

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the premise that America's veterans deserve the very best in healthcare and services. Motivation - because the infrastructure of today's VA system is hindered in many ways from delivering on their fundamental principles.

This article serves to underscore both the needs and the opportunities that face the VA and the current administration. The following elaborates the key issues that have emerged over the past several decades and persist yet today, while also providing recommendations that will equip the VA with a model for success well into the future.

We at Romanyk Consulting believe that the VA is positioned at a great point of opportunity brought about by the combined dynamics of our veterans' changing needs, market pressures, and facility and infrastructure challenges. Systematic barriers that have hindered the VA's mission in recent decades can be eliminated through holistic planning and a focus toward the future. The President's words call for change. For that change to have lasting impact within the VA - and for the benefit of those it serves - it must come as a result of strategic repositioning.

Ultimately, it is not a question of if the VA will reposition itself, but of when its leaders make the commitment to doing so, knowing that upholding its mission for our veterans - those who have made the greatest sacrifices for our freedom - is worthy of our greatest investment for their well-being.

CONTEXT

The 1940's stands out as the boom era of the United States Veterans Administration and its hospital system. World War II veterans could be assured of returning home to what were then state-of-the-art medical facilities, with services specially-suited to their and their families' injuries and illnesses, all available within reasonable distance from their hometowns. The infrastructure built by the VA in that decade would serve to provide quality care and support for veterans returning home from Korea and Vietnam, as well. In those days, the VA lived out its mission with purpose and excellence.

Modern medicine and healthcare in general have changed at warp-speed over the past several decades thanks to technology and improvement contributions from all sectors of the global health community including clinics, hospitals, universities, private industry, and the VA itself. There are, however, challenges and obstacles that have hindered the VA's ability to keep pace, slowing the development of its capabilities and preventing it from fully achieving

Our team is proud to be able to offer solutions and services for federal agencies. Our GSA MOBIS Schedule can be found on our website romanyakconsulting.com

its proud mission. Systems, services and facilities that were once considered the hallmark of the industry are struggling to meet some of the most basic needs and expectations of today's patients.

CHALLENGES

As the largest healthcare system in the United States, the VA has in many ways defined the industry's standards and delivery mechanisms. But the same expansive infrastructure that sets the VA apart as a leader has also challenged its ability to keep pace with the evolving marketplace.

The VA systems and facilities that were built to match veteran's needs in the '40s and '50s are now stretched to accommodate services and programs that did not exist - and could not be anticipated - in that generation.

Below, we explore two fundamental challenges facing today's VA, which we believe deserve central focus as the VA considers the future of its integrated healthcare delivery system: Delivery of Care and Facilities.

Delivery of Care

Several dynamics have contributed to the emergence of new care delivery methods for today's veterans. Rapid advancements in weaponry and wartime technologies have forever changed the face of the combat zone – introducing new psychological and emotional challenges for service men and women, while significantly altering the types of physical injuries sustained in battle. As a result, fewer veterans require inpatient services, while a greater need is seen for outpatient care, readjustment counseling, mental health services, and the like.

Additionally, advancements in healthcare delivery methods and technologies have redefined how and where services can be delivered. The traditional model has been reshaped, requiring less dependency on large medical centers, and offering greater flexibility and accessibility through Community-Based Outpatient Clinics.

And while the VA has made many strides toward adapting its existing facilities and programs to accommodate this change, renovation alone cannot fully accommodate modern care delivery – nor will it adequately serve the VA's need for flexibility and scalability for the future.

Shifting trends in care delivery do more than impact the distribution of services and programs required of the VA. They are, indeed, a

leading driver that has impact on every other area of the organizational infrastructure. Most noticeably, in the area of facilities, which themselves exist as the primary means for delivery of care.

Facilities

The imbalance between the VA's existing facilities and their effective utilization is a familiar concern for the organization. Medical centers that were built to accommodate a large in-patient population are now left largely over-bedded, underutilized, and in some cases – vacant, resulting in great operational and maintenance costs. Allocation of resources to these facilities defers energy, budgets and attention from programs and services that bring direct value to veterans and their families.



In the best of all worlds, the VA would scrap every ineffective facility and rebuild from the ground-up to enable a modern, innovative and future-focused infrastructure. However, reality dictates a phased approach to construction. Concerns such as the historical preservation of facilities, environmental management, prioritization, budgets, and legislative bias all have impact on when, where, why and how the VA divests in existing properties or invests in new or re-developed facilities.

In addition to facing concerns over existing structures, the VA has much to weigh in the area of new facility planning, including “growing requirements for increased productivity, reduced operating and maintenance expenses, enhanced energy and sustainability, higher disaster resistance, improved accessibility, and other societal objectives.” 2

There is no easy answer to the facilities questions facing the VA today. But what is certain is that ongoing changes in society, veteran demographics, and care delivery will only widen the gap between the current infrastructure and the needs of those it serves.

OPPORTUNITIES

Certainly, the VA is not unaware of its own challenges. In fact, the key issues facing the administration have been well-documented in recent years, and some efforts have been taken to address the most immediate and critical needs.

Romanyk Consulting would like to hear from you. If you have any thoughts on this newsletter or ideas for topics you would like to see in future newsletters, please contact us.

Several recent engagements between Romanyk Consulting and the VA have been successful in achieving some very effective short-term fixes. There are, however, more profound changes that would benefit both the VA and those it serves. Solutions that take aim at big-picture opportunities would move the management of the delivery system from reactive to proactive.

In our opinion, the ability of the VA to effectively carry out its mission would be strengthened by a comprehensive review of the system, including: services, facilities, processes, and staff. Certainly, an effort of this magnitude cannot be achieved without great focus, commitment and investment. But considering the alternative – and its costs - such a broad-sweeping initiative is not only reasonable, but imperative to the future success of the VA.

Difficult decisions need to be made to secure the future of the VA and its ability to uphold its sacred mission. Pros and cons need to be weighed, and compromises made around all of the interests and concerns involved in the issue. None of this can be done without a centralized, collaborative strategy – one that goes beyond the view of an individual medical center, a single VISN, or even the VA as a whole.

Quality healthcare for our veterans requires an infrastructure that can support the entire continuum of care – from the public sector, to the Department of Defense, to the VA. This continuum calls for more than modern facilities and services, or even integrated data systems and solid staffing practices.

A truly integrated healthcare system can be achieved only on the basis of a new philosophy – one that matches individually-focused patient care with a globally-aware organizational strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The VA can set the standard for integrated healthcare. Romanyk Consulting can help. Since 1996, we've worked with organizations, both public and private, to turn challenges into opportunities through strategic planning and organizational transformation.

At Romanyk, our client partnerships result in a deep understanding of the individual organization's real concerns and prominent issues. Our VA



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experience to date has afforded us a certain level of perspective on many of the issues outlined in this paper. A deeper strategic engagement would allow us to develop a tailor-made strategy to address the VA's unique needs.

We would appreciate the opportunity to connect with the VA to discuss these opportunities in more depth, and share in detail how our consulting services can bring value to the VA's planning process.

1 "Transcript: Obama's Speech to Congress." CBSnews.com. 24 Feb. 2009. CBS.

2 Report of the Task Group for "Innovative Future Building Environments for VA Healthcare Delivery". Rep. Washington, DC: National Institute of Building Sciences, 2009.

General Services Administration (GSA) Award Schedule Extended

Romanyk Consulting Corp. (RCC) is proud to state that the General Services Administration (GSA) has exercised RCC's option to extend the term of our GSA schedule, Contract Number: GS-10F-0347P, for an additional five-year period from June 3, 2009 to June 1, 2014.

The logo for the General Services Administration (GSA) is displayed in white text on a dark blue square background. The letters 'GSA' are in a bold, sans-serif font, with a small star positioned to the right of the letter 'A'.

Under our Consolidated Schedule Contract, RCC provides professional Mission-Oriented Business Integrated Services (MOBIS) to federal agencies. Through our GSA contract, RCC has established and maintained many valuable relationships with a variety of federal agencies.

The extension of our contract demonstrates the comprehensive knowledge of quality management practice and theory required of federal agencies and military commands. The primary areas of practice for RCC are in health services, surety, information technology, telecommunication, and water utilities. We exhibit the necessary knowledge to support federal agencies in their ability to react to new and changing mandates and evolutionary influences.

RCC has demonstrated the ability to deliver expert assistance to many federal activities and environments in the past and we strive for continued excellence in the future.