



Our CHOIR VERG mission: To engage Veterans as partners to identify, design, implement and disseminate high quality, relevant and trustworthy health services research. [Learn more!](#)

Have feedback or suggestions for the newsletter? Please email Aishwarya Khanna, Aishwarya.khanna@va.gov

Advances in electronic health records: Veterans help shape the future of care

Electronic health records (EHRs) and patient portals, such as My HealtheVet (MHV), are a powerful tool in the digital age for Veterans to take charge of their health care. Millions of Veterans rely on these tools to manage their prescriptions and appointments, communicate with providers, and organize personal health records. The Department of Veterans Affairs is planning a major transition of its legacy EHR system to the more modern Cerner system, which will replace MHV and represent a major change in how Veterans electronically access health information. In line with the Veteran Consultant Network (VCN) mission to give Veterans an active and engaged voice in research initiatives affecting their own care, VCN held a virtual listening session on January 12th to gather feedback from our Boston-area VCN Veteran Consultants on this

planned transition. The session was coordinated by VA investigators Gemmae Fix, Ph.D., and Jessica Davila, Ph.D. See *PROVEN Vet study on page 2*. Veteran Consultants were able to share opinions, concerns, and expectations about the transition, as well as thoughts on how Cerner could improve on MHV. Veteran Jonathan Yee stated, “Big EHR changes in other health care systems often cause major headaches. It was great to see that VA investigators are using VCN to proactively engage with the Veteran population which has a large stake in this rollout.”

Interested in presenting at the next VCN Research Conference?

Email Juliet Wu:

Juliet.wu2@va.gov

Stakeholder council meeting highlights

See [full meeting highlights for more details!](#)

- Stakeholders discussed the updated HSR&D priorities, and emphasized their importance:
 - Whole health
 - Health equity and social determinants of health
 - Suicide prevention
 - Access to care
 - EHR modernization
- Provided feedback on a body of work around social determinants of health and access to care for rural Veterans.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE EVALUATION TEAM!

The VERG evaluation subcommittee recently published a paper describing perceived impacts from working together on research teams at CHOIR. You can find the paper here: [Evaluating the Impacts of Patient Engagement on Health Services Research Teams: Lessons from the Veteran Consulting Network](#).

Subcommittee updates

Evaluation Subcommittee

We are tracking Veteran involvement in grants submitted by CHOIR researchers to look at trends in use of Veteran consultants and grant outcomes.

Contact: [Eileen Dryden](#)

Best Practices Subcommittee

We are planning our next event to share more VERG tools for success. Let us know if you'd like to learn more about any best practices, so that we can meet *your* needs. Stay tuned for our next event!

Contact: [Lauren Gaj](#)

Stakeholder Council: See meeting highlights. Contact: [Katelyn Marchany](#)

Veteran Consultant Network (VCN)

The 6th VCN Veterans' Research Conference was held in April, where investigators presented their grant ideas for input from Veteran consultants. The VCN has also held an info session for CHOIR postdoc fellows, a listening session on Cerner implementation, and is improving Veteran consultant payment options. Contact: [Juliet Wu](#)

Veteran engagement spotlight: PROVEN VET listening sessions



PROVEN
Coordinating Hub to Promote Research
Optimizing Veteran-centric EHR Networks

**Supporting Veterans through
Electronic Health Record Transitions**
A LISTENING TOUR OF VETERAN ENGAGEMENT GROUPS

Enhancing PROVEN's Understanding of the Veteran Experience during the Cerner Transition (PROVEN VET) is a study that aims to develop a Veteran-informed research agenda related to EHR modernization for HSR&D investigators. Rural Veterans may rely more heavily on their electronic health record, given barriers to visiting a VA medical center. The PROVEN VET team hosted listening sessions to ask Veterans about their knowledge and awareness about the transition, and what is important to know.

PROVEN VET met with the GROVE Rural Health Virtual Vet Engagement Group (RCVREB), among other Veteran stakeholder groups, to further their aim of engaging Veteran stakeholders to identify important subject areas for Veterans associated with the Cerner implementation. Project lead, Dr. Gemmae Fix, shared that the depth of knowledge and experiences across the rural Veteran board was particularly notable:

"I learned about Veteran Service Officers, Veteran Service Organizations and the roles both play in rural communities. I also got a richer understanding of what 'rural' means. I've only lived in cities and hadn't considered things like mail delivery in rural areas, which was surprisingly complicated. The facilitators purposefully made space to listen to the differing member opinions, and it was clear that this group had a history of working together that informed the session we were invited to."

The PROVEN VET team spans Bedford, MA; Houston, TX; and Los Angeles, CA. Team members are Gemmae Fix, Jessica Davila, Alison Cogan, Trenton Haltom, Abby Herbst, Stephanie Shimada, and Catherine Brayton.

"It was nice to hear from a diversity of Veteran Engagement Groups. Being able to have a virtual visit with RCVREB provided important insights to my team about the needs and concerns of rural Veterans"

-Dr. Gemmae Fix on the value of hosting a listening session with the GROVE Rural Veteran Board, RCVREB

Interested in becoming a Veteran Consultant? Contact Shawn Dunlap at Shawn.Dunlap@va.gov to learn more!

Happening elsewhere in Veteran engagement

With 24% of all Veterans living rurally it is important to understand the contextual factors that influence rural Veterans and how they receive and experience health care. In the Spring of 2021, our colleagues at the Center for Growing Rural Outreach through Veteran Engagement (GROVE) began engaging rural Veterans in research through the Rural Colorado Veteran Research Engagement Board. The Veteran board is composed of nine members who have diverse military service backgrounds and various involvement in their local Veteran communities.

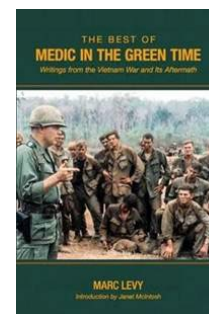
Their engagement has already proved impactful to the direction and understanding of VA research projects. In a study on COVID-19's impact on loneliness in rural Veterans, board members influenced the questions VA researchers were asking rural participants.

Due to this feedback the study now captures information about rural-specific living situations, social supports, impacts on health and health care, and impact on other VA services outside of Veterans Health Administration, such as Veterans Benefit Administration. To learn more, [check out GROVE's recent Veterans' Perspectives article](#) or contact Gretchen.Stage@va.gov or Kelty.Fehling@va.gov.



GROVE is housed at the Denver, CO, VA medical center and the rural Veteran board meets online every month.

Featured Reading



For the **VERG book group's** next event, we will be hosting Marc Levy, Veteran, and author of [Medic in the Green Time: Writings from the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath](#) (2020). We hope to meet in person as well as virtually. We'll meet later in the year (location and date to be determined) to talk more about the book and the value of sharing our own stories. Please contact Shawn.Dunlap@va.gov if you want to be kept informed as plans develop.