



**Federal Update
for
Dec. 29, 2014 – Jan. 2, 2015**



VA to Pilot IBM Computer Technology to Assist Physicians in Caring for Patients

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun a two-year pilot to study innovative approaches to quickly search electronic medical records and medical literature for relevant published studies. During the pilot, VA will assess how the technology may accelerate evidence-based clinical decisions.

“Physicians can save valuable time finding the right information needed to care for their patients with this sophisticated and advanced technology,” said Interim Under Secretary for Health Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D. “A tool that can help a clinician quickly collect, combine, and present information will allow them to spend more time listening and interacting with the Veteran. This directly supports the patient-centric medicine VA is committed to delivering every day.” The IBM Corporation was selected to provide the system which uses its “Watson technology” made famous on Jeopardy! in 2011. Today, IBM is working with several healthcare organizations to apply Watson's cognitive capabilities in helping doctors identify and analyze cancer treatment options. Learning about the opportunities and challenges these next-generation technologies may have is part of an ongoing effort for VA to advance the quality of healthcare provided to our Nation’s Veterans. During the pilot, clinical decisions will not be made on actual patient encounters, but instead will use realistic simulations. The notice can be found here:

<https://www.fbo.gov/notices/1e9767c0e2880cf2e4ce98f75b113efa>

VA Implements National Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative

As part of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) ongoing effort to improve Veterans' access to healthcare, VA is announcing the launch of a national Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative (HSI) to encourage diabetic Veterans receiving VA care to seek support to lower the risk of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). The new initiative will enable Veterans living with diabetes to work more closely with their VA clinicians to personalize health care goals and improve self-management of the disease.

"The Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative is designed to enable Veterans and their families, partners and caregivers to create a personal plan for blood sugar management based upon the Veteran's unique health goals," said Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Interim Under Secretary for Health. "Our objective is to change how diabetes is managed in VA and the United States, and to help patients improve their personal well-being, not just manage their numbers."

Diabetes is one of the most prevalent diseases among older Americans, with one in four Veterans suffering from the disease. Recent clinical studies indicate that when diet, exercise and stress reduction are not successful, the benefits of achieving intensive blood sugar control with medication are less effective. This is especially true for hypoglycemic agents (pills or insulin) used for those patients who have had diabetes for many years and those who have additional serious health conditions.

HSI's key elements emphasize shared decision-making and universal health literacy to ensure Veterans understand the health information provided by their VA health care team. This includes the "teach back method" where Veterans and their caregivers are asked questions to be certain they understand and can act on key elements of self-management, including diet, exercise, glucose monitoring, managing medications, and insulin injections. The focus of the HSI is to help raise awareness among patients who may be at risk.

"Hypoglycemia has only recently been prioritized as a national public health issue, but Federal agencies are taking a leadership role in addressing the problem. We are proud to note the collaboration of VA with Department of Health and Human Services in aggressively addressing this problem," Dr. Clancy added.

For more information about VA health care, please visit

<http://www.va.gov/health/>.