

VA Mobile Discussion Series

VA Online Scheduling

DENISE KENNEDY: Hello everyone. Welcome, and thank you for attending our VA Mobile Health Discussion Series webinar. My name is Denise Kennedy, and I'm going to run through a few brief technical reminders before we begin the discussion about VA Online Scheduling.

Your phone lines are muted. We will be taking questions through the chat feature. The chat function is available to you at the right of your screen in the middle section. If you're experiencing any difficulties, please use that chat and one will be in touch to offer assistance. To respect everyone's schedules, we will keep this moving.

We have a large group of attendees joining by phone today. We want you to know we will answer as many questions as time allows, but we will end promptly at 4 pm. To ensure we end on time, I'll prioritize questions that are relevant to the larger group first. If you have an individual issue or question that is specific to your site, we'll work to follow up with you after the webinar, as well as be providing some guidance for how to get questions answered throughout this presentation. Please be sure if you have an issue that you're signed in with your first and last name, or let me know what that is so that we can connect with you afterwards.

All right, now that we have that out of the way, let's keep this moving. Today we welcome Dr. Deyne Bentt, Clinical Director, VA Mobile Health Deployment and Evaluation, and Julie Gentile, Senior Training Consultant. Also joining us to assist with questions today is Carnetta Scruggs, Conor O'Brien, Shayo Bakare and Kay Lawyer. They will be chiming in to answer some questions as well as we go forward. As I mentioned, please use the chat feature, and we'll stop intermittently to get those questions answered. To download the presentation, please click on the file name below the chat screen.

With that, I'll turn it over to you, Dr. Bentt.

DR. BENTT: Thanks, Denise, and thank you for having myself and Julie on the VA Mobile Discussion Series to talk about VA Online Scheduling.

These are the subjects that we'll be covering today in this presentation: what is VA Online Scheduling; the challenges that we've encountered in implementing VA Online Scheduling; the latest improvement updates; how Veterans access VA Online Scheduling through My Health eVet; how a Veteran will use VA Online Scheduling once they have reached this site either directly, or through My Health eVet; and what the next steps are.

What is VA Online Scheduling? It's essentially the Veteran Appointment Request App, with a new name. Most of you on the line probably have attended one of these webinars before where we talked about the Veteran Appointment Request App, so it's nothing



new, it's just a new name. But the app has gone through a significant number of upgrades in the meantime, and also a change in the way we refer to it.

When VAR was born back in 2012, it was a very simple application that allowed Veterans to submit request options to schedulers so that they could schedule their appointments for them without the need for the Veteran to use the telephone. The app has evolved significantly since then, with many new functions. It's no longer appropriate to call it a "request application." The main feature of the app is self-scheduling in addition to many of the new features that are now available, so we've decided to, more appropriately, re-name and re-brand the application to VA Online Scheduling.

What does this do? It gives Veterans the ability to manage their health care appointments online.

What can the Veteran do with this application? Since the app was first implemented in January of 2017, Veterans have been able to self-schedule return visits to see their Primary Care physicians. They could also submit through the application, three date and time preferences for a scheduler to schedule that appointment for them. And they could do that either into Primary Care or into Mental Health.

With the application, they were also able to view all of their upcoming appointments, regardless of the specialty. Regardless of if it's in orthopedics, pain clinic, urology, etc. They could cancel a select number of those appointments and they could also exchange messages with VA schedulers. So, the problem that this application was solving was the indeterminate amount of time that Veterans were spending on the phone with schedulers or waiting for schedulers to make their outpatient appointments.

With this messaging feature, a Veteran can submit a request. If the scheduler cannot fulfill that request exactly as desired by the Veteran, the scheduler can send the Veteran a message through the application. The Veteran could then respond with a message and hopefully come to an agreed upon date with a limited number of messaging through the application.

The goal of the messaging was to help eliminate the need for a telephone conversation, and this is what the application does. The application also allows Veterans to receive e-mail notifications of changes in the status of the requests that they have submitted through the application.

Since January of 2017, this is where we are. Out of 141 sites, we have 106 live with VA Online Scheduling. To date, we have roughly 5,000 self-scheduled appointments that have been made by Veterans through the application. They have submitted roughly 4,000 requests for appointments in Primary Care and Mental Health. And they've used the application to cancel roughly 1,600 appointments.

The benefit of being able to cancel an appointment through the app is that if the experience of using the telephone to manage appointments is so arduous for a Veteran, if they need to cancel an appointment – what are they likely to do if the only option is a telephone? They probably will not bother to cancel the appointment, and they just won't



show up. The perceived benefit of the ability to cancel appointments through this application is that appointments will be canceled instead of just having no-shows, which means that those appointments are then made available for other Veterans to use for appointments and therefore, improving the availability of spots and the efficiency of the appointment system for Veterans.

This has not gone without its challenges. In most cases, when we're implementing new systems or software, people want to know what were the obstacles, what were the challenges that you've encountered along the way. You can see from the previous slide that we're still at just over 100 facilities live with the application out of 140. Some of the problems that have occurred, that we're still working on resolutions for are what is preventing us from expanding to all of the facilities across the enterprise.

One of the challenges, which has not been something that has limited our ability to expand has been the DS Logon Authentication. In order for a Veteran to use the application, they have to have a secure authentication process because we are dealing with their personal and secure health information. The DS Logon secure authentication is owned by the DOD and therefore, its control, its administration and the ability to make changes are essentially out of the control of the Department of Veteran Affairs.

DS Logon can be fairly arduous for Veterans to obtain. Mostly because of the authentication process, which is required to get the credential. A lot of Veterans, even after going through the arduous task of obtaining their DS Logon, ran into a lot of problems using it to authenticate into the application. That was one of the main challenges for the Veterans that we encountered and one of the latest updates to Veteran Online Scheduling, which I'll talk about in a couple minutes, addresses that issue.

Other issues that were problematic include we have integrated VistA. For facilities that were a child facility from a VistA point of view and part of an integrated system where there was a parent facility we ran into the unexpected problem that the app was not able to handle the granularity needed to show that the activity was at the child facility.

For example, let's take Albany as the Integrated VistA and Buffalo is the parent facility. The only thing that the app would see is Buffalo. So, if a Veteran goes in to use the app, tries to go in to make an appointment and sees Buffalo as his facility, he might say, "Hang on a minute, my facility is Albany. Why do I only see Buffalo?" And that would cause some confusion.

Another unexpected challenge that we encountered was with clinics that don't have standard start times or appointment length. By standard, I mean they start on the hour or half hour and they last 30 minutes or an hour. Many clinics are set up in 10 to 20-minute increments. So, they would start on the hour, the next appointment would be at, for example, 10 past, and then 20 past, etc. So that's the 10 to 20-minute increment. And then they have clinics that are set up to start at five past the hour. That would be the odd start time. Neither the staff facing application and Scheduling Manager were



able to process any requests or activities in clinics that were set up with these odd start times, or non-standard appointment lengths.

Those two problems prevented some 25-30 facilities from being included in VA Online Scheduling, so far.

As they say, if you see one VistA, you've seen one VistA; every VistA system has evolved in a disparate and separate manner. We ran into problems in certain facilities that were specific only to those facilities, didn't happen anywhere else, only happened there and they were different. One facility would have one specific problem that was not happening anywhere else; one facility would show up with a different problem. The variability of the instances caused some isolated problems that required remediation before the application could be used in those facilities.

Where are we today? We've just implemented the latest version of the application. We have new features. We've got remediation of some of the problems that we ran into, which means that we've been able to bring on some more sites, bringing us up to 106-107 sites. The new features that the latest version of VA Online Scheduling have brought are as follows: we have expanded the use of the application to other specialties. So, we started with audiology and optometry, and we are now capable of introducing any other medical specialty for the use of VA Online Scheduling. It's just a matter of flicking a switch for those specialties and communicating with the specialist for the appropriate training and application of the use of VA Online Scheduling.

A major improvement, or a major update to the use of VA Online Scheduling, is the ability of Veterans now to authenticate into VA Online Scheduling using their My HealthVet Premium credentials. This is huge for Veterans. That was as, as I mentioned, the use of the DS Logon was a major inhibitor for Veterans using this application. However, there are already hundreds of thousands of Veterans who use their Premium My HealthVet credentials to log into My HealthVet to interact with their medical record. Those Veterans can now use that same credentials to log into VA Online Scheduling. Not only that, if they've logged into My HealthVet using their Premium credential, it's a single sign-on process where they click on a link that takes them to the VA Online Scheduling without the need to enter their log-in credentials again.

That is part of the third bullet, which is the integration of My HealthVet Patient Portal with VA Online Scheduling so that it's more of a continuous and seamless process for Veterans moving from My HealthVet to VA Online Scheduling.

With that, I will pause and pass it back to Denise.

DENISE KENNEDY: Great. Thanks, Dr. Bentt. We do have some questions coming in. Please keep them coming. We're going to turn the floor over to Julie now, but we'll come back and get some of those questions answered for everyone. Julie, over to you.

JULIE GENTILE: Thank you, very much.



Now that Dr. Bentt has spoken to the background of the VA Online Scheduling, I would like to focus on what has changed about My HealthVet, what are the changes that you will see there. And that will depend on how the Veteran is logged in. Let's just do an overview first. And as Dr. Bentt referred to, the name is no longer VAR. It's now been changed to VA Online Scheduling tool. So, you won't see VAR in the My HealthVet materials at all anymore. This whole integration, it will be phased in strategically over time. They seem to move along very quickly with it.

If a Veteran is logged into My HealthVet and eligible for online scheduling, the user has a single log-on, which was just explained also. VA appointments are available at, I think the number was 140-some VAMCs and you can go to the link on this screen to see all the VAMCs that currently have online scheduling available. I believe that's kept up to date pretty meticulously.

Also, users will be able to access VA appointments through Vets.gov and the benefit website. So, let's take a look at My HealthVet specifically. There are several pages where you will primarily see changes in My HealthVet and those changes will be dependent upon how the user is logged in. You will see changes in the My HealthVet home page; on the dashboard, you'll see changes. The Spotlight article, Keeping Up With All Your VA Appointments, is another place where you will see changes. The view my VA Appointments page and the schedule a VA Appointment page are two more pages where you will see changes.

Three primary things can impact eligibility for online scheduling. The patient must be a VA patient, have a Premium My HealthVet account, and if the online scheduling tool is available at the VAMC where they're trying to schedule an appointment and if the appointment is at a clinic or with a physician that is set up for online scheduling.

Let's first look at the My HealthVet account type. My HealthVet account must be a VA patient and have a Premium account to use the online scheduling capabilities. If they have a Basic account or an Advanced account, they will not be able to access online scheduling. If we look at the VAMC where the appointments request is, the appointment must be scheduled at a participating VAMC where the online scheduling tool is offered currently. The appointment must be with a participating clinic or physician and right now, as Dr. Bentt pointed out, they've been handling appointments with Primary Care, Mental Health, Audiology, Optometry and now they're adding more specialties. The VAMC where the appointment is being made must have VA appointment scheduling slots available for them. Dr. Bentt, correct me if I'm wrong here; my understanding was that some of the facilities were getting overwhelmed with appointments and there was a certain point at which they would have to cut off more online scheduling appointments until some of those were processed. Is that true?

DR. BENTT: No, I don't believe so. I think you may be referring to the requests that were being received and then being handled in a timely manner.

JULIE GENTILE: Okay.



Sometimes that can historically be a problem and may not be anymore.

There are different groups of users who will see changes in My HealthVet. There's eligible Premium My HealthVet users. There's anonymous users or somebody who just isn't even logged into My HealthVet, but exploring My HealthVet. There's Basic and Advanced My HealthVet users, and there's ineligible Premium My HealthVet users. In other words, a user can have a Premium account but their VAMC is not currently participating in online scheduling yet.

Let's first look at the user who has the Premium My HealthVet account and is a VA patient. They're making their appointment at a participating VAMC. The pages that have changed for that user are the home page; you'll see the Appointments tile has changed, the VAR button and the Spotlight. The "View my VA Appointments" and "Schedule My VA Appointments" are changed for this Veteran also.

If we take a look at that, we'll first look at the homepage. You can see that appointment tile in the dashboard has changed. Now you see "View My VA Appointments" and "Schedule a VA Appointment" for the Premium/eligible user. You will see that the text in this gray box down in the Spotlight now says "Schedule a VA Appointment." It used to say VAR, I believe.

If the user selects the dashboard, the "View My VA Appointments" link, they will come to this "View My VA Appointments" page before your appointment box displays listing tasks the user may want to perform prior to actually scheduling their appointments. They'll see their "VA Summary of Appointments" table, and they will see a "Schedule a VA Appointment" button. Also, notice up here that there's a user guide link, a print link and a help link, so users can easily get access to help for any questions they might have about how to proceed.

If the user selects "Schedule a VA Appointment" from the dashboard, in the Appointments Tile, the schedule VA Appointment page displays. Historically, if the user logged into My HealthVet then they selected the bar icon on the left. If you recall that there was a VAR icon on the left-hand navigation window, they would have to log in a second time to continue to VAR. With the update that Dr. Bentt pointed out, if the user logs into My HealthVet with their Premium user ID and password or their DS Logon, and then selects "Schedule a New Appointment" button, they do not have to log in again to schedule their appointment. There is a single log-on now for eligible Premium users in My HealthVet.

The "Schedule a VA Appointment" page informs the user how to schedule online appointments. You can see here's a list of the VAMCs that are participating and detailed instructions on how to actually use the online scheduling tool. You can see that there are "Schedule a VA Appointment" buttons you can move right into the online scheduling tool. And here, in case there is a problem, maybe they're not a participating VAMC, here you can find the facility's phone number to call and make an appointment.



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So those are the changes that the eligible Premium user in My HealthVet will see in My HealthVet now. The dashboard will look different, the appointment style, the VAR button and then the "View VA Appointments" and "Schedule VA Appointments" pages are changed also.

Next, we're going to look at the type of user who isn't logged in to My HealthVet, they're just exploring. You'll see that, again, the home page has changed; and the "Keeping up with All Your VA Appointments" in the Spotlight article have changed. The will not see a "View my VA Appointments" or a "Schedule a VA Appointment" page.

If the user accesses My HealthVet and they're not logged in the dashboard displays an appointment tile here that has a "Read More" link at the bottom. Again, the first gray button here in Spotlight is "Schedule a VA Appointment" and no longer VAR.

If the user selects "Read More" in the appointment tile, or the "Schedule an Appointment Online" button down in the Spotlight, the user in both cases is directed to the Spotlight article called "Keeping Up with All Your VA Appointments". This article educates the user on how to schedule appointments online.

It provides a link for applying for VA health care, for upgrading their My HealthVet account to Premium, for finding their VA facility phone number and logging into My HealthVet Premium account to access the online scheduling tool. There's lots of links that are available to them in this article. Those are the changes that the anonymous user will see in My HealthVet.

The next user that we'd like to talk about is a My HealthVet Basic or Advanced user. They have a Basic or Advanced My HealthVet account and they are a VA patient. The pages that will change for them are the Appointments tile on the home page as we've seen before and the "View my VA Appointments" page.

The changes that they will see in the My HealthVet home page are that the VA Appointments tile will show their a "View My Appointments" link now and the gray button in Spotlight is "Schedule a VA Appointment".

Now, if the user selects the "View my VA Appointments" on the dashboard or the "Schedule a VA Appointment" in Spotlight, the "View my VA Appointments" page displays. It really explains why they can't schedule appointments, and it explains why they can't proceed here. The user is directed to a link to open a Premium account to enable them to schedule appointments online, and a link displays that helps them find their facility phone number to call for an appointment. It gives them a way to schedule an appointment, either online or by phone.

Those are the changes that the Basic and Advanced user will see in My HealthVet.

The last user we're going to look at is an ineligible. They have a Premium account and they're a VA patient, but the appointment that they would like to schedule is with a non-participating VAMC. Or where maybe the request for appointments are backed up. My HealthVet pages that are changed for this user: the home page, again, the



Appointment tile, the VAR button on the Spotlight, the "View my VA Appointments" and "Schedule a VA Appointment" page.

On My HealthVet home page, in the Appointments tile, they will see "View my VA Appointments" but you notice they do not see "Schedule a VA Appointment" up here. They still have the button "Schedule a VA Appointment" down in the Spotlight. If the user selects "View my VA Appointments" on the dashboard, they will get the "View my VA Appointments" page where it tells you what to do before your appointment and notice there is no "Schedule a VA Appointment" button on this page. If you recall, in the one for the eligible Premium user, there was a "Schedule a VA Appointment" button on this "View my VA Appointments" page. So, they can go look at what appointments they have scheduled, they can look at that summary, they can go to their facility locator and they can learn more about their VA appointments, but there is not an option to schedule.

If they select the "Schedule a VA Appointment" button in the Spotlight here, there's a list that of things that "Schedule a VA Appointment" page displays. It just notifies the user that their preferred VAMC currently is not using the online scheduling tool, essentially. And tells them how to schedule an appointment by phone and provides the facility phone number here.

In every instance, what they've done is they've given the user a direction to move in. Whether it's call for an appointment or upgrade their account. It tells them how they can proceed to schedule an appointment one way or another.

That really wraps up the changes that these four groups will see in My HealthVet pertaining to online scheduling. If the user is in e-benefits or Vets.gov, they will be able to access the online scheduling tool. Maybe they logged with their DS Logon or they can get to My HealthVet through those two websites. They can come into My HealthVet through e-benefits. They'll come in from e-benefits and Vets.gov can take them directly to the scheduling tool, if they meet the criteria.

Okay, that pretty much wraps up the changes that you'll see regarding scheduling VA appointments in My HealthVet. With that, I will turn it over to Denise.

DENISE KENNEDY: Great, thanks. We have a few questions. I know the team has been answering quite a few of these but I'm going to put some of these up for those who are not necessarily following that chat box. I know it's a small box and there's lots of typing going.

There are quite a few questions about online scheduling for the integrated sites. Can you touch base on the timing of when that's available?

DR. BENTT: Yeah, I can answer that. The fix for that is actually in the process of being engineered. We're targeting the availability of the next version of the application, which will have that fix to be ready for field testing in roughly February of next year. That means that it will be ready, assuming all goes well, for widespread use probably in March.



DENISE KENNEDY: Excellent, thanks. There was a question and a follow-up question: If the VA makes changes to a Veteran-made appointment, does that also generate an email to the Veteran? Not just a request for an appointment but an actual appointment.

DR. BENTT: No, that is something that's in the backlog. Right now, the only notification that they receive are changes in their request. But receiving text messaging or e-mail notifications of changes to your appointments themselves, and notifications of an upcoming appointment are features that are in the backlog to be added to future versions of the application.

DENISE KENNEDY: Excellent, thanks. Another question here: What should you do if a Veteran schedules multiple Primary Care appointments. For example, if a Veteran schedules an appointment to be seen every week?

DR. BENTT: We get this question in almost every forum that we talk about this application. Veterans are doing that anyway. The Deputy Chief of Informatics of D.C. VA is a primary care doctor who has Veterans walking in almost every week when they don't need to come back, so, the problem is not with the application. It is with the Veteran and however you manage that Veteran now is the way you would do that even when they are doing it through the application. It's a Veteran management issue, nothing that the application can help with. Though, it is something that we can potentially provide some sort of technological solution for in the future. It's not there right now.

DENISE KENNEDY: Okay, excellent. What happens when the next available appointment times are out past thirty days?

DR. BENTT: If the Veteran logs in, tries to self-schedule and does not see anything available in the time frame of the app, which is 90 days, then they have the two options. One, they can submit a request, and in the text box they can say what the appointment request is for. In those situations, the scheduler can have options. They can discuss with the physician and maybe overbook, if that's something that is in their workflow. If the Veteran does not want to submit a request, then they can go through the pre-existing means to make appointments – use the telephone or in person, discuss their need with the clinic staff.

DENISE KENNEDY: Great, thank you. Are patients able to schedule in acute slots?

DR. BENTT: By acute slots, I'm assuming that you mean the business rules, which are in the heads of the scheduler are to hold certain clinic slots for certain types of patients. For example, if the clinic has thirty-minute appointments but a new patient requires an hour, the schedulers know to hold two slots per day of thirty-minute appointments together so that if a new patient comes in, they can apply them there. So, the application allows whatever is open in the clinic in VistA, will be available to the Veteran. This is a question that we frequently get from facilities who have “mental business rules,” I'll call them, and have a way of managing their clinics that works right now that could be disrupted by the use of self-scheduling by patients.



The quick answer is, if the appointment is open, yes, they can schedule into it. What's the solution? There's no universal solution at this point. Each individual facility or clinic would have to look at their situations and make the most of the tools and what's available. Now, VA Online Scheduling is in a sense a tool that can be used, not for everyone, and is applicable in certain situations and not in others. It was mandated to be used in primary care, but for other specialties, it's an option. If it doesn't work for your specialty, then don't use self-scheduling through this app if it is not beneficial to the way your clinic works.

DENISE KENNEDY: Excellent. We're just going to take two more questions at this time, allow you guys to continue with your presentation and we will come back to questions. I think I've missed about thirty questions while you were talking, Dr. Bentt.

One question is: how do providers sign up for online scheduling?

DR. BENTT: It's by clinic. I'll try to be as brief as possible. Essentially you would go into VistA and change the settings in your clinic to, one, be available to view by the Veteran; two, be open for self-scheduling. You will want to put a patient-friendly name in the patient-friendly name field so that the clinic name makes sense to Veterans.

Once the clinic decides to make themselves available, those are the changes that are needed to expose it. You would also configure in the VA Tool Set there's another flag that you would turn on for your specialty. So, there are a few changes that you would make once you decide, the clinic, that you want to participate.

DENISE KENNEDY: Excellent. And how does the application capture a P.I.D. from the Veteran?

DR. BENTT: Can you explain the acronym please?

JULIE GENTILE: I think they are referring to provider indicated dating.

DR. BENTT: The application does not capture a date that the provider has established. The only date that the application can capture is the date that the Veteran has indicated as his preferred date. If the "P" is referring to preferred date, then yes, it captures that and it's stored in VistA.

The clinically indicated date is not captured or retrieved through the application.

DENISE KENNEDY: Excellent, thank you. I know we have a lot more questions to get to. Why don't we continue with the presentation, and we'll work on the back end here to tee-up some more if we have time at the end.

DR. BENTT: Great, thank you, Denise. I will quickly show you what the Veteran experience is like when they use the application. And the first screen that they will see is a web-based application, so the Veteran can use it from a computer, laptop, a smart phone, a tablet, anything that has a modern browser and an internet connection. So, it's linked, they can make a shortcut. On iOS devices, they can make the shortcut look like



an app. And as I mentioned, they can also get to it through My HealthVet. If they're accessing the online scheduling directly, the first thing they see is the login page. Previously where their only option was to use their DS Logon. They now get two options; use your DS Logon or use your My HealthVet Premium account to log in to the online scheduling.

The landing page shows them the list of appointments. In this case, in this image, there were no upcoming appointments for this Veteran. This page also shows the list of requests and the status of these requests that they have submitted through the application.

Let's just take a quick look at the user menu. If they click on the top right corner where there's an icon of a person with some horizontal lines, it takes them to the user menu, which gives them the following options: how to get help, how to give feedback, how to set up preferences in the application, and then exit choices. They can log out or they can go to the launch pad where they can switch between Veteran facing applications without the need to log in again because their launch pad offers single sign-on.

In order to make a new appointment, let's show you how they would do that. From the landing page, which shows the list of appointments and requests on the top left corner. On the right hand of the screen, there is a button that says, "New Appointment or Request." By clicking on that, they are taken to this screen. The first thing they do is they choose the type of care that they're looking for. Currently the options are Primary Care, Mental Health, Audiology, Optometry and Express Care. Depending on how the facility has configured the VA Tool Set, which is the configuration tool, this will limit what the Veteran sees as options for the type of care.

Let's say at the Washington, D.C. VA, we're going to offer Mental Health and Primary Care and Audiology. We would go into the Tool Set and click "On" for those three specialties. But we're not going to offer Optometry. A Veteran who has care at that facility, when he goes into the application, the type of care options will only be those three specified by the facility.

After selecting the type of care, then you would select whether they would be scheduling themselves into a clinic, or whether they would be submitting a request for a VA Scheduler to schedule for them. This is another configurable option. Once the facility chooses the types of care that they're making available to the Veterans through the app, they also configure whether that type of care is offering self-scheduling or request capability, or both. Depending on what is configured, the Veteran will get different options when they get to this page to use this page and the application.

In this case, the Veteran has chosen Primary Care and they're going to schedule themselves, so they check the button. They would then enter the preferred date, and they would get a list of appointments available on the date that they requested. If that doesn't have the Veteran's options, then they can choose a different date that is close to that date and see what options are available there. And essentially click on a date, and they're scheduled.



Then they get a confirmation that the appointment is scheduled. When they click on the top left link, which says "Appointments and Requests," that takes them back to the home page. That new appointment will appear in the list of appointments in their application.

This next screen shows what they would do to submit a request to a Scheduler to schedule an appointment for them. They would again, start with choosing type of care. In this case, it's Primary Care. They would then click the button that says, "Submit the Request to a Scheduler." They would complete a few more fields. They can submit three different date and time preferences for that appointment and some other options that are listed on the right of this slide: the purpose for the visit, what type of visit, whether it's phone, video where available, or in-person, date and time preferences, phone number, whether or not they like to receive a phone call to confirm the appointment, and the best time for the VA staff member to call, etc. etc. They can also enter their e-mail address if they would like to get status update changes of their request.

Then once the request has been submitted, they get a confirmation with the details of the request. If they were to click on the appointment request link at the top left of the page, they would see that request and its status listed on their home page.

One of the other features is canceling appointments or requests. In this case, the Veteran wants to cancel an appointment. From his list of appointments on the home screen, he would tap on whichever appointment he wants to cancel. And he will get this screen that says, "Details of the Appointment." And it says, "I need to cancel this appointment." Click yes. You could answer a reason for cancellation. There is a drop-down with several options. Then once you click on "Cancel Appointment," the cancellation confirmation appears, and if the Veteran is to return to the home screen, that appointment would no longer be listed on that home screen.

In the same way, they can cancel requests that have been submitted. Again, if you tap on "View Requests" from the home screen, it brings up the request details and gives you a button at the bottom that says, "Cancel Request" and once that request is canceled, the next screen gives you a cancellation confirmation. If the Veteran goes back to the home screen, they would see that the status of the request would now say "Canceled."

That is a brief outline of the Veteran experience using the application. So, what's next? This application is in constant development. We have a number of features in the backlog that we prioritize for development. We have a number of problems that still need remediation that are being worked at the moment. We have a schedule of upcoming releases of new, future versions of the application, which include the new features and the remediations. But in the meantime, we continue to monitor the usage of the application. We have metrics that we are monitoring and analyzing. We use these, along with feedback from the field and from Veterans to guide and prioritize the features and the upgrades that will be included in future versions of the application.



We are now able to expand the use of the application to any specialty. Currently, we have moved from Primary Care and Mental Health to include Audiology and Optometry. Right on the heels of those two new specialties, we have Podiatry, Nutrition, Prosthetics, Wheel Chair Clinic and Sleep Care that are interested in being included for the use of the VA Online Scheduling.

One of the next major features that is soon to be implemented is the ability of the Veteran to use the app in conjunction with video clinic visit. We have an application called, "VA Video Connect," which is in the latest stages of field testing. With VA Video Connect, providers and Veterans can connect through a video call, regardless of where they are because it's a web-based system that sends an e-mail to the provider and the Veteran, and they can log into this video session on just about any intimate connected device.

We're also developing the ability for Veterans to use VA Online Scheduling for Community Care Appointments. As previously mentioned, we are looking to implement a more robust and a broader capability of text messaging and email notifications to patients of upcoming appointments and changes to their VA appointments.

So, on that note, back to you, Denise, for more questions.

DENISE KENNEDY: I do have quite a few questions. One question that I did want you to address is: What is Express Care?

DR. BENTT: Express Care is a new workflow that helps reduce the dependency of using a telephone for Veteran communication with the facility for pseudo-urgent health care needs. For example, right now, a lot of facilities have call centers. The Veteran can use it if they have a semi-urgent need and it's the same situation. The call center, depending on how well they're staffed and how well they function, requires a fair bit of time on hold for Veterans and a less than optimal situation.

So, Express Care is an online workflow that allows Veterans to make requests for semi-urgent health care using the application. This is how it would work; instead of using the telephone, a facility would advertise, and when I say advertise, it means it would show up in the Veterans app and will let Veterans know that this capability is available. So, they would advertise when you can call, for example, office hours between, let's say, 11 a.m. and noon every day. During that period of time, a Veteran who has a semi-urgent need can submit a request to the facility, an Express Care request that would be triaged by a commission in a timely fashion and give the Veteran several options to deal with their need – whether it be a phone call, a video visit or just a message that would take care of their need.

It removes the telephone from the equation and allows the transactions to happen through online messaging, online communication through the app, video appointments and ad hoc video visits if necessary.

DENISE KENNEDY: Excellent.



Okay, with that, we will take all the questions that we did not get to today and we will try to get the implementation team, as promised, to follow-up with all of those. Thank you everyone for joining us today. On your screen now, if you want to provide any feedback on today's presentation, any additional topics you would like us to discuss for the mobile health discussion series, we are always looking for your feedback.



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