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MHS MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM | U.S. Department of Defense

## From the Desk of the ASD/HA

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Posted by: **Charles L. Rice, M.D.** | Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs  
Wednesday, March 17, 2010



To Our Military Health System Staff and Stakeholders –

One of Secretary Gates' top priorities is high quality health care. As President of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences since 2005, a retired Navy Reserve Captain and the father of a serving officer, I have a deep personal commitment to ensuring that quality health care and support is provided to our active duty force and their families, particularly our nation's wounded, ill or injured warriors, as well as our retirees and their families.

I was asked by the senior DoD leadership to temporarily perform the duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, effective March 1, while the process for appointing a permanent candidate is underway. As such, my number one priority is to ensure that this care and support meets expectations and, to do that, I have outlined the four goals on which I will focus the majority of my attention:

### **Care for Wounded Warriors, Their Families, and Those Who Care for Them**

**1. Shaping the way ahead for the DoD electronic health record.** Our current electronic health records provide critical support for health care delivery and management, force health protection and readiness, medical surveillance and for sharing with health care partners. Our Electronic Health Record Way Ahead will modernize our current system, align it with national objectives, and empower patients through access to personal health record. It will be designed by and for those who provide the care for our patients and will facilitate the use by our patients and their families.

**2. Ensuring that Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) initiatives update and enhance our health care facilities.** The BRAC recommendations are bringing about comprehensive changes, will improve use and distribution of our facilities nationwide, and will enhance health care delivery and state-of-the-art medical education and training, and cutting-edge basic science and clinical research across the MHS. By September 11, 2011, two of the largest regions (National Capital Area and San Antonio) will integrate the existing military treatment facilities into new facilities that will seamlessly function, incorporating assets from all of the military services. These medical centers will incorporate patient-

focused, family-centered health care delivery with evidence-based structural design to provide beneficiaries with the absolute best healing environment.

**3. Focusing the TRICARE contracting process for civilian-provided care to ensure our beneficiaries receive superior care.** The MHS is responsible to promote health and provide care for 9.6 million individuals, so it is imperative that we contract efficiently with the civilian health care sector to provide those services which are beyond the capacity of our military treatment facilities' capabilities to ensure that care.

**4. Sharpening our communications to provide everyone the information they need to navigate our MHS.** Our beneficiaries have questions and they deserve answers. It is vital that our service members and their families are able to understand their health care benefits and easily access the care they so rightfully deserve. We will sharpen our strategic communications so that all of our beneficiaries know where to turn, or who to ask, for the information they need about health care.

As I transition into my new duties, I am particularly grateful to Mr. Allen Middleton, who stepped up from Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Budgets and Financial Policy into the Health Affairs "front office" in April 2009 and provided invaluable leadership when and where it was needed. His expertise will be critical to me as he continues to perform the duties of Acting Principal Deputy, and I hope to live up to the standards both he and Ms. Ellen Embrey set before me.

Dr. Clifford Stanley, our newly appointed Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness, said in a memorandum to Health Affairs and TRICARE Management Activity staff recently that "compassion, excellence and a heightened sense of urgency will help us fulfill our duty." I assure you that we will increase our efforts to fulfill our duty to our most important assets – our service members and their families.

Source: [http://www.health.mil/blog/10-03-17/From\\_the\\_Desk\\_of\\_the\\_ASD\\_HA.aspx](http://www.health.mil/blog/10-03-17/From_the_Desk_of_the_ASD_HA.aspx)