

[By Patrick McArdle](#)

The Vermont Veterans Home is on a high priority list to receive federal money for an electronic medical records system project, which would cost about \$1.2 million, that would make caring for the home's residents easier and more efficient, according to the home's administrator Melissa Jackson.

When Dr. Peter King, medical director at the Veterans Administration community-based outpatient clinic in Bennington, comes to the veterans home to see a patient, he has to spend some time and effort searching through paper files to get the information he needs, according to Jackson.

"When it's all in the (electronic) medical record system, he can pull all those items up, right on his screen, and search by what information he's looking for. It will make his job so much easier. It will make my nurses' jobs that much easier, too, when they're (responding to) an acute event, they can call up all that information and have it right then and there instead of, 'Hold on, let me flip to that part of the chart,'" Jackson said.

King said the paper records on veterans were frequently not indexed well and information could be hard to find.

"We're all used to using the electronic medical records since we started here at the clinic and all you have to do is look at one chart. At the veterans home, it's a workout. You don't have to go to the gym that day. (The patients' files) are just full of paper, they're big and it just reminds you ... of one of the big reasons we went to electronic medical records," King said.

Vermont's congressional delegation, Sens. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., and Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., announced the veterans home's place on the list Friday.

Welch, who was in Bennington on Friday and visited the outpatient clinic, told Jackson and King

the federal funding was "not totally a done deal" but said it "looks very good" for the veterans home.

"The electronic medical records are extremely important for patient care and for cost control. Anything that's better care and lower cost, we need to be doing more of. Here we've got this unique arrangement, the veterans home across the street from a local clinic. ... We have a very large veterans population in the area so I think all of those were factors in (the veterans home earning a high priority on the list,)" Welch said.

The Veterans Administration is expected to provide more than \$790,000 through its State Home Construction Grant program. A requirement of the grant is that the state provide the remaining 35 percent and Welch said the state had already made that commitment.

Moving medical records to an electronic, rather than a paper system, is expected to improve communication both internally and with other medical providers who might treat the home's residents and make the records more accurate.

If the grant is awarded, Jackson said she expects the project, which would include hardware and software, will take about 12 to 18 months to implement.

The new system would allow the veterans home in Bennington, Vermont's only state-run nursing home for veterans, to get rid of a lot of paper, Jackson said. "We probably have millions and millions of pages. An average medical record is this thick," Jackson said, holding hands several inches apart.