

Major General Elder Granger

Deputy Director and Program Executive Officer, TRICARE Management Activity
U.S. Department of Defense

By Michael J. Keegan

Expanding Healthcare Services for the Military Community

As the deputy director and program executive officer of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)'s TRICARE Management Activity, Major General Elder Granger serves as the principal advisor on health plan policy to the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, and provides oversight of its managed care program. With an annual budget of \$11 billion, slightly less than half of a total \$28.16 billion Defense Health Program, General Granger manages the operation and overall performance of this program, ensuring accessibility to high-quality healthcare for 9.1 million beneficiaries worldwide. As Granger explains, the mission of the military health system is "to provide world-class healthcare anywhere, anytime, to millions of beneficiaries scattered throughout the globe and around the world." TRICARE plays an integral role in the successful pursuit of DoD's healthcare mission.

A physician himself, Granger further emphasizes that "what [we] really want to do is make sure that we're training a medical force, making sure we're protecting that force that we deploy, and managing the health of our military communities." He explains that the military health system has three key components to do just this: "We have a direct care system, we have a purchase care system, and part of the system where we do other things with our managed care support contractors, [such as] pharmacy." Granger points out that TRICARE represents a buffer "whereby if we [can] not take care of you in our military treatment facility, called the direct care system, there is a robust TRICARE Network, and that consists of right now over 200,000 providers ... 50,000 hospitals ... over 55,000 pharmacies throughout the country—a coordinated, integrated healthcare system."

Over the years, the TRICARE program has expanded, continuing to enhance benefits at a time when the private sector is shifting more of its costs for providing medical care to its employee base. "If you look over time, we've brought

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- Deputy Director and Program Executive Officer, TRICARE Management Activity, U.S. Department of Defense
- Commander, Task Force 44th Medical Command and Command Surgeon for the Multinational Corps Iraq
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- Chief of Medicine, 2nd General Hospital, Landstuhl, Germany, United States Army

on Remote TRICARE, Prime Remote, the TRICARE Reserve Select program, the TRICARE for Life program." At the same time, although the cost to the beneficiary is the same, the cost share paid by the beneficiary as a percentage of overall program costs has dropped over half.

This situation becomes even more challenging because as benefits have expanded, demand has increased. Over the past several years, TRICARE has seen an increasing influx of beneficiaries who have opted out of other health insurance for the more robust coverage afforded them under TRICARE. To meet this increased demand while sustaining the program for the future, the military health system, and in particular TRICARE, has focused on becoming more efficient and effective in its delivery and operation.

"The last two to four years, we worked aggressively on a military healthcare system strategic plan ... looking at doing smarter contracting or buying of resources, putting systems into place to truly manage that," says Granger. As a result,



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the program has changed its large managed care support contracts, pushed to get the best possible pricing for pharmaceuticals, and worked with other federal departments, such as the Veterans Administration, to share services where possible. “We have some short-term goals as well as some long-term goals in terms of how we do that.... We’re putting more emphasis on getting truly performance-based type contracts, and we’re looking at civilian models and best practices.... And the final challenge is making sure we [have] the right financial structure to sustain this great benefit,” underscores Granger.

Granger points out that the military health system and its TRICARE program are in a fairly unique position to manage and influence the health of its members. “In our population, we have the opportunity to start managing or preventing different diseases [as we] actually go through the entire life cycle of healthcare or life in general with our military beneficiaries,” notes Granger. Using preventive-care methods, rigorously pursuing disease management, and focusing on evidence-based medicine, the TRICARE program employs a patient-centered, patient-focused approach to health. He explains that “if a [condition is] going to be chronic, we manage it; we try to prevent the complications. And we do it in such a way that the patient has a role in terms of patient-centered care; educating our patients to also serve as a partner with us to help us do the right thing, to take care of them ... giving them more responsibility in managing their care.” He calls it “infotherapy”—information therapy—“giving patients information, allowing them to make healthy choices.” With the advent of TRICARE Online, TRICARE has leveraged the web to further its efforts in infotherapy. “As we go forward, TRICARE Online is really going to be the portal into how our beneficiaries as well as providers continue to use [it] for patient information, in terms of information therapy, making appointments online, looking at lab, X-ray, and pharmacy information, as well as being able to order or refill medication,” says Granger.

A major concern for the TRICARE system has been the sheer volume of information that it collects on clinical encounters

on a daily basis, and how to best use this information for the patient. “[It] is trying to get all this clinical and administrative information into one electronic system, and that system we have right now is called AHLTA—it’s our electronic healthcare record,” says Granger. He adds that the challenge is: “How do we take all that information in our clinical data repository and truly make it useful?” The military health system, in concert with other federal departments, has worked toward understanding the proper use, application, and advances of the electronic health record. “I truly believe that the military healthcare system, working with the other fellow agencies in the nation, can truly have an ideal electronic healthcare record, so we can manage not only our DoD population but also set some benchmark for the private sector,” says Granger.

Under Granger’s stewardship, the TRICARE program continues to provide robust healthcare coverage to this country’s service members and their families at a time when similar programs are reducing benefits and increasing premiums. It is making a difference and striving to provide high-quality healthcare that matters to Granger. “You want to be able to look back on life and say ... I did make a difference. I gave something back in terms of touching the lives of not only a few but maybe many, but also serving my nation and serving my country, because at the end of the day, that’s what life is all about.” ■

To learn more about the TRICARE Management Activity, go to www.tricare.mil.



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To read the full transcript of *The Business of Government Hour’s* interview with Major General Elder Granger, visit the Center’s website at www.businessofgovernment.org.