

# Robot surgery looms for veterans

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New contractual arrangements for veterans' hospital access, a new health reimbursement item for robotic surgery, and the advent of personalised health record packages underline a looming electronic transformation of health services.

The old days of having separate repatriation hospitals for ageing military veterans are well and truly gone. Nowadays the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) has a standing invitation (the tender you have when it's not quite a formal tender) for virtually all of Australia's private hospitals to proffer individual fee schedules for effectively the whole gamut of hospital health services, including mental health.

Existing private hospital veterans' contracts expire on June 30 this year. So for some months DVA has been prodding private hospital managements to generate a new range of fees they would like to charge this time around, to be settled by mutual agreement, preferably in time for suitable media releases around July 1.

DVA's current approach was set out in a briefing session on November 2nd last year, delivered to assemblies around Australia by televisual links from Canberra, to save the expense and time required to freight DVA representatives around the continent for the purpose.

To maximise access choices for veterans, all qualified providers can participate. No tender submission or evaluation is needed, just agreement on fees, and they can enter and exit at any time.

"The invitation is not a tender," the department stated. "However, Part 1 serves the same purpose and is set out in the same form as a standard RFT [request for tender]."

## **PATIENT ENGAGEMENT**

The concept of robotic surgeons has progressed to the point of actual procedures being carried out in this way. DVA has specifically cited this pending development as an example of a new hospital item which private hospitals may wish to add to the lengthy pro forma spreadsheets on fees they need to complete.

There are a steady succession of electronic advances in healthcare showing up in tender lists compiled by New Zealand-based tenders specialist TenderLink, a Fairfax affiliate. These are coming from a half dozen or so major healthcare software firms, and a number of smaller Australian-originated startups.

Australians should increasingly be able have their health records, going back as far as they can remember, processed into an electronic data bundle, stored either on your own personal (or company) computer, or more sensibly somewhere in personally-controlled cloud storage, where it can be accessed, under your control, from anywhere on the globe, for use by relevant health professionals.

If some elderly Australian tourist is taken poorly while enjoying a leisurely cruise down the Danube in Europe, the cruise ship's medical staff would be able to check recent vaccinations, allergies to particular antibiotics, past surgery, details of recent infections, data on any implants, prostheses and other medical equipment aids, pills for heart conditions, lung problems, digestive issues or Diabetes II and other material.

In the last few years, personalised health informatics packages have become a growing service in America. According to Susan deCathelineau, vice president global healthcare for US firm Hyland Software, expect similar developments in Australia from this year on.

"We're seeing more and more patient engagement for access to the electronic healthcare systems," she says. "We have an ability to release information, provider to provider but also provider to patient."

Read more: <http://www.afr.com/business/health/robot-surgery-looms-for-veterans-20160309-gnecz0#ixzz42wVcQNDs>

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