

**TRICARE Management Activity,  
Military Health System  
Falls Church, Virginia  
Department of Defense**

The mission of the Military Health System, under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, is to enhance the Department of Defense and our nation's security by providing health support for the full range of military operations and sustaining the health of all those entrusted to our care. Currently 8.7 million beneficiaries are eligible for DoD health benefits through TRICARE. The TRICARE Management Activity recognized that patients who utilized pharmacy services in the Military Health System were exposed to unnecessary safety risks because the databases of its three dispensing points – direct care, retail networks, and mail order – were not integrated. Consequently, patients' complete medication histories were not available to enable identification of potential life-threatening drug interactions.

In response to this potential life-threatening problem, the TRICARE Management Activity developed the Pharmacy Data Transaction Service, which created a centralized data repository that records information about prescriptions filled for DoD beneficiaries through any of the three avenues mentioned above. The immediate objective of implementing the integrated system was to improve the quality of care provided to beneficiaries by reducing their risk to adverse drug interactions and therapeutic duplications. The strategic objective was to provide enhanced pharmacy benefit programs to the beneficiary population while reducing overall program costs.

The integrated system requires all health care system points of service to electronically transmit selected patient and drug information to the pharmacy claims manager. The average complete transaction time, from prescription order entry to encrypted transaction response, is 3.1 seconds for sites located within the United States and 3.8 seconds for sites outside the United States. The fact that the system performs the clinical drug screenings on-line in real time without disrupting patient care has been a major factor in its success. The potential vulnerabilities of an internet-based system are virtually eliminated through the use of the most current electronic technology. To safeguard the privacy of beneficiary information, all stored historical pharmacy data and transactions are encrypted to meet the privacy and security standards required by the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

The system is currently used at approximately 350 direct care military treatment facilities worldwide, with more than 700 dispensing pharmacies, and more than 40,000 individual providers using on-line order entry. Since activation in December 2000, the system has processed more than 113 million prescription transactions, and the Prospective Drug Utilization Review function has identified more than 52,700 potentially life-threatening drug interactions.

The new integrated system is a great success. It provides a critical tool for delivering a quality pharmacy benefit now, as well as historical data to develop future policies, procedures and programs that will further enhance the pharmacy benefit.