





























































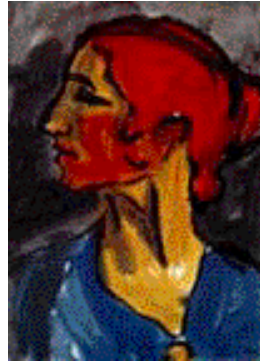


# Authorization and red tape

*The weakness I see is the way it was explained to me. In order to use it I still have to wait to see my PCP from the VA to be put on a waiting list, and have each individual appointment approved by my VA. I can only see her three times a year. It makes no sense. – attempt without receipt*



# Authorization and red tape



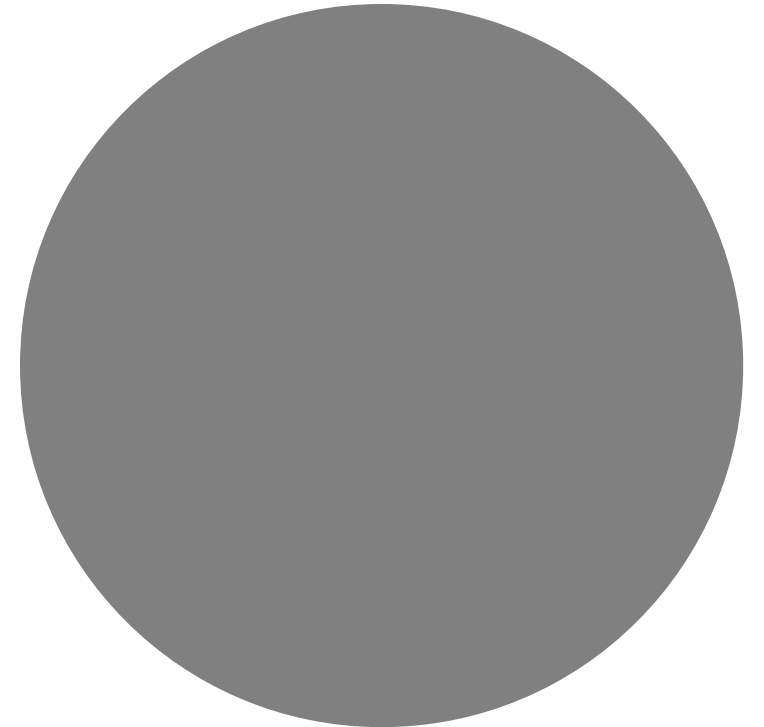
*In the end, I got care and it was quicker than going to the VA but it was still a bureaucratic nightmare that you had to fight. It shouldn't be that way.*  
– received Choice care

- Some participants were surprised to learn they would have to travel a longer distance, or experience a longer wait time to see a Choice provider than their regular VA provider due to inadequate provider networks.

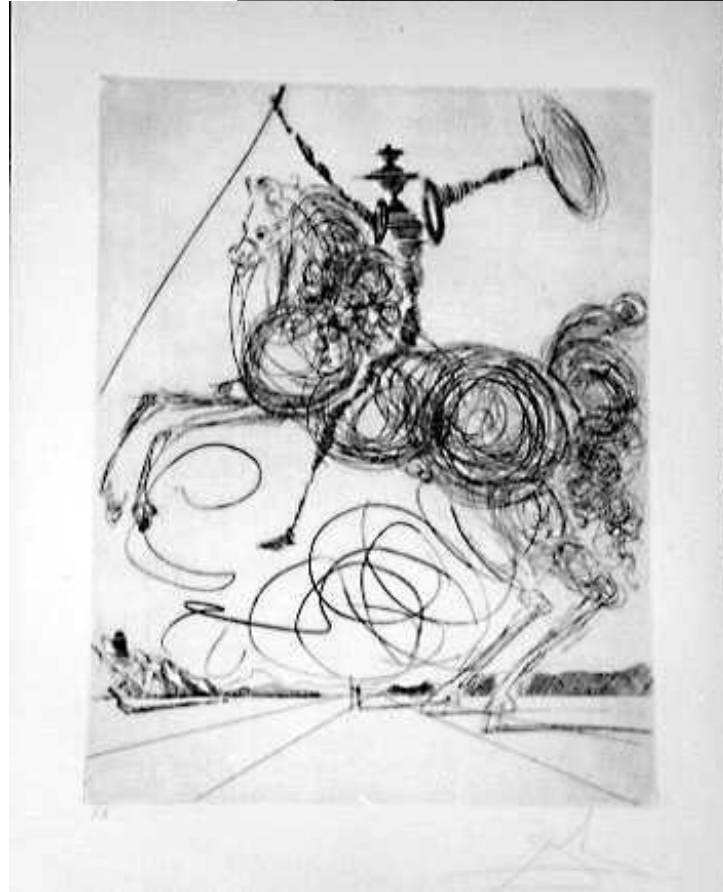
*I tried to [use Choice] but they couldn't find somebody to work with them out here where I live. - attempt without receipt*

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Increased distance



# Increased distance



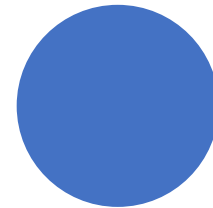
- *I got frustrated with the program. I would like to go to the Choice for mental health, but it's so much trouble to call and set up an appointment. I find out he's 5-10 minutes from the VA hospital, I might as well go to the VA. – received Choice care*



*They need to open up better communication between choice doctors and the TPA to schedule appointments and the choice and VA pharmacy. When I call the Choice program I have to talk to three or four different people before things get done. I don't know if the first person doesn't record it in the computer or forgets or drops it. There are a lot of problems there. – received Choice care*

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Choice use concerns: coordinating doctors and TPA

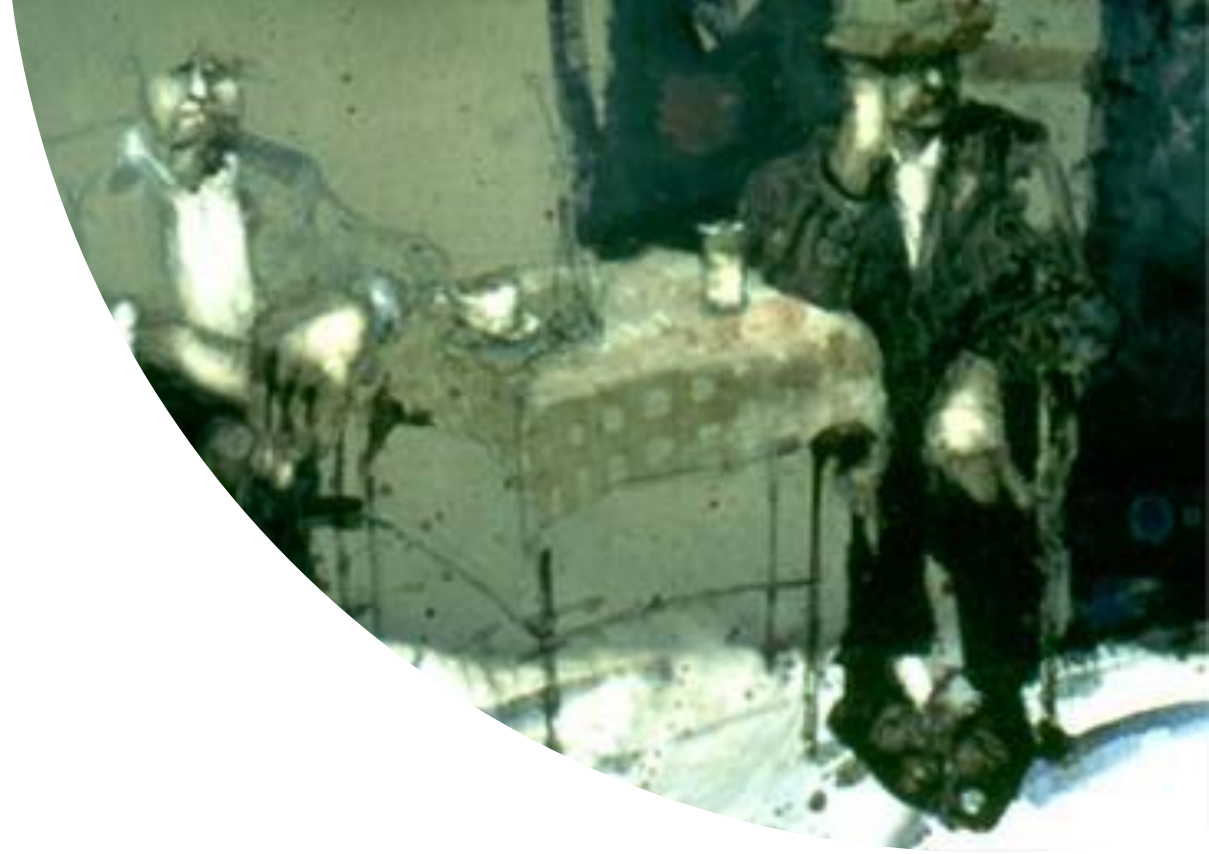
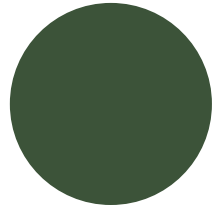
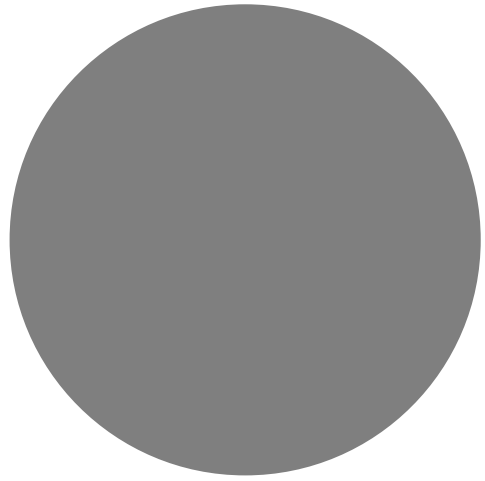


# Choice use concerns: billing

*I'm still getting a bill from the provider because Tricare hasn't paid the bill. – received Choice care*

*I thought the VA was going to pay for everything and now I'm getting bills in the mail. To state we will pay this or everything. The financial part is what is being paid and what's not being paid. I got bills sent to me for \$300 for a urine test. Something is wrong here if you send me a bill. TriWest straightened it out. – received Choice care*





# Satisfaction Themes

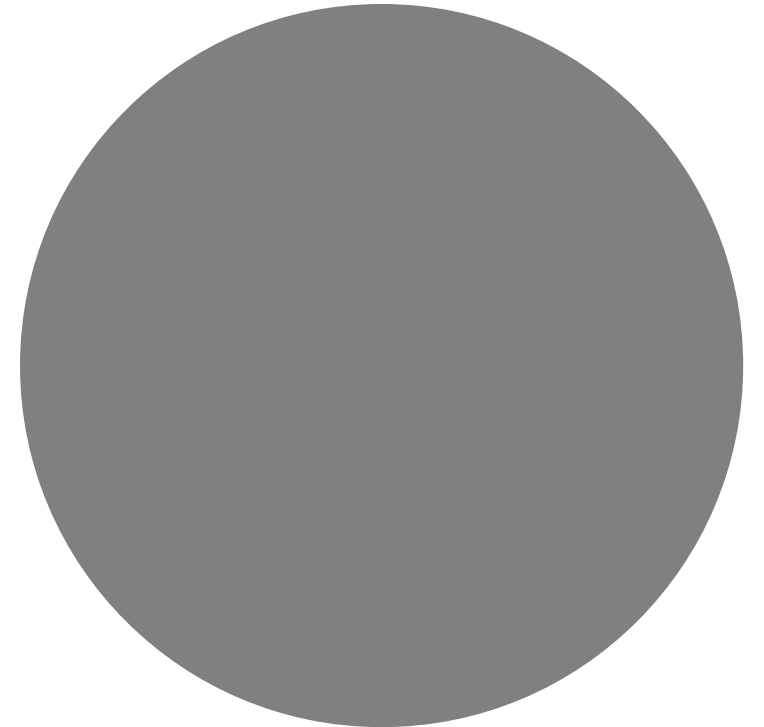


- 267 statements; 79% vs. 61% for Choice vs. attempt

*If I could use it, it would be very strong because it takes me two hours to get to [the VA]. If I got to see a doctor here it would be more convenient. – attempt without receipt*

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Reduced distance





## Reduced distance

*I get an appointment within a few days, and not a few months. And it is closer. I mean, I don't have to get someone to drive with me to go to the doctor. I can just hop down the street, because that's where he's at. – received Choice care*



# Improved wait times

- 52 statements; 21% vs. 3% for Choice receipt versus attempt

*The Choice Program is pretty good at getting you an appointment when you have a doctor. First started, it took awhile. Now, that I'm in, I can call the doctor and go in as long as I'm in the 3 month suspension. – received Choice care*

Scheduling  
appointments  
&  
signing up

- Scheduling = 89 statements; 34% vs. 12% for Choice receipt vs. attempt
- Signing up = 18 statements; 11% versus 5% for Choice receipt versus attempt

*They were Johnny-on-the-spot when I called them, and they were eager to help me get set up for this, [but] that's as far as it went. – attempt without receipt*

*I called Health Net, and they called me back the same day or the next day with my appointment. – received Choice care*

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16 statements; 10% vs. 5% for Choice receipt  
versus attempt

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*Choice is good once you get [in]. Once you get  
through it, it's smooth. The providers are  
great.— received Choice care*

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Good  
providers



# Interest in Choice

*Do you intend to seek care outside of the VA through the Choice Program in the future?*

Most respondents said “yes” or “maybe”

No attempt: 86%

Attempt without receipt: 78%

Received Choice care: 89%

# Discussion

- Most participants were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with VA healthcare
- Participants were also satisfied with Choice when they succeeded in getting care
- Those participants unsuccessful in attempts to use Choice were highly dissatisfied with the program – much less satisfied with Choice than with VA care
- Many participants expressed interest in using or continuing to use Choice in the future

# Sources of dissatisfaction

- Prior studies reported on challenges with Choice implementation during the first year
- Qualitative interviews revealed these barriers were main sources of dissatisfaction, especially for Veterans who did not receive care
- Scheduling and staffing through third party administrators was the area of greatest frustration
- Inadequate provider networks, red tape, and billing problems added to frustrations

# Satisfaction when care was received

When patients got into the system, they were reported satisfaction with

- Improved wait times
- Reduced travel distance
- Good care from Choice providers

*I think it has the potential to be a great program. It's just been poorly handled, and rolled out so far. It's getting better. There have been improvements, even since I've been in it. – received Choice care*

# Implications

- VA is working to address main sources of dissatisfaction
- The Veterans Coordination and Rewarding Experiences (CARE) Act - simplify Choice program to meet Veterans healthcare needs quickly and in a way that is easy to understand
- Need to assess whether satisfaction with scheduling, information, choice of local providers improve
- Ongoing evaluations should consider the experiences of patients trying to use the program, in addition to those who succeed in getting care

# Limitations

- Interviews conducted with some of the first users of Choice program – may not reflect views today
- Recruitment of Veterans from select VA medical centers, stratified sampling
- Small numbers precluded modeling of differences in qualitative themes

# Conclusions

Choice eligible Veterans are satisfied with VA care

Choice can work when:

- the providers patients' want are available
- the scheduling system is user-friendly
- the burden is not too great

## Funding and co-investigators

Differences in Satisfaction with Choice: Foundation for Evaluating the Choice Act, **QUERI VCA 15-245** (PI - Zickmund)

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## Questions & Discussion