

Defence discharges HealthKeys

Karen Dearne | June 16, 2009

THE Defence Force is fast-tracking the purchase of a commercial, off-the-shelf electronic health record system, conceding defeat in an eight-year project to roll out HealthKeys, with only 40 per cent of personnel medical records converted from paper.

Vice-Chief of the Defence Force Lieutenant General David Hurley said e-health was "pretty much critical" to a significant number of reforms to be made in the health area.

"In the first six months of this year, we brought in industry, the Defence Science and Technology Organisation and so forth, and within four months we generated a fully COTS-linked e-health system that meets all the standards of the National E-Health Transition Authority," he told a Senate estimates hearing.

"We did not have to cut a line of code, so we are really confident that this will be able to be brought in."

A Defence spokesman said a rapid prototype, development and evaluation group had developed a "proof of concept involving a connected suite of commercial products".

ADF surgeon-general Major General Paul Alexander said the results had been promising.

"My intent would be to have a pilot commence in the next financial year and if it goes well, as the evaluators indicate, we will go out quite widely."

New Zealand-based software developer Orion Health -- which has built a strong customer base in the US and Canada as well as Australia -- was involved in the concept, but the Defence spokesman said no single product was likely to deliver the full functions required.

He said the proposed e-health system "which will be an integrated suite of COTS products, will be subject to an open tender process".

Defence health's poor performance over HealthKeys came to light during a previous senate committee hearing relating to levels of obesity among personnel.

The spokesman said HealthKeys was no longer sustainable within the department's new IT environment. "There has been some remediation of performance issues, pending the identification and rollout of a future e-health system," he said.

"The standards-based approach will ensure alignment under the National E-Health Strategy, and will increase capacity for the exchange of information between Defence, Health and Veterans Affairs.

"More importantly, it means the health of Defence personnel can be managed in a holistic way."