

DATE: September 17, 2019

TO: Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

FROM: René G. Santiago, Deputy County Executive and
Director, County of Santa Clara Health System

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SUBJECT: Communication with Medical Staff through Inmate Tablets

On December 4, 2018 the Board directed Administration to provide an off-agenda report on date uncertain relating to the capacity of inmates to make appointments and communicate with medical staff as a component of the Request for Proposals to provide inmates with tablets.

This report is intended to provide the Board with an update regarding ongoing efforts to allow electronic submission of White Cards, the form that inmates use to communicate with and/or request services from the medical and mental health staff.

HISTORY:

The Santa Clara County Procurement Department issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the inmate calling system and tablet services on November 22, 2017. Because the RFP has already been released prior to the directive to explore the use tablets as a means for inmates to communicate with the medical staff, the electronic submission of White Cards was not included in the scope of service.

Custody Health Services (CHS) asked the Sheriff's Office if it would be possible to include the electronic submission of White Cards as part of the services menu for the inmate tablets. The Sheriff's Office worked with the vendor to come up with a solution and presented a pilot plan for the electronic submission of White Cards during the March 2019 Joint Operations Committee Meeting. The CHS Informatics Manager and Information Technology staff reviewed the plan and technology to be used in the electronic submission of White Cards and found that:

1. The vendor's use of Google Chrome was not secure enough to meet the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requirements for privacy;
2. CHS staff would still have to manually input the White Card information in the HealthLink system; and
3. The logistics for forwarding the White Card to the appropriate unit (i.e. medical, dental, etc.) was not incorporated in the pilot plan, and would therefore require manual printing, sorting and distribution by CHS staff.

As an alternative, CHS decided to look into re-configuring the *MyHealth Online* application for use by inmates since it adheres to strict Federal and State confidentiality laws to protect patients' privacy. The application is currently used by Valley Medical Center and the ambulatory clinics to provide patients with online access to their health information. Although the application allows users to access medical records and look up various information such their medications, test/lab results, or medical history, it will initially be limited to submitting White Cards to ensure that inmates do not gain access to the internet.

CHALLENGES:

Access

The *MyHealth Online* application requires internet access through a computer or a data-enabled smartphone/tablet. Because inmates are not allowed to have internet access, staff needs to figure out how to limit internet access to the application only and prevent inmates from hacking the system to gain access to the internet.

Training

Although the application is user-friendly, it is anticipated that some inmates may need assistance in learning how to use *MyHealth Online*. CHS staff will need to develop an effective system to provide inmates with information on how to use the application, particularly since the jail population constantly changes.

Hardware

Due to privacy issues, *MyHealth Online* is not compatible with the tablets that will be issued to inmates. CHS would have to purchase all computers/tablets and place them in a secure, private area in all housing units.

(It must be noted that the *MyHealth Online* application could not be included in the Sheriff's Office tablet project because the vendor is using a specially modified version of Google Chrome which limits use access to only one website.)

Staffing

It is anticipated that there would be a significant increase in the number of White Cards submitted due to the ease of use and novelty of the tablet system. CHS will need to conduct a study to determine if the number of White Cards submitted would go down once the novelty wears off or continue to remain high. If the numbers remain high, CHS will have to re-assess staffing prior to implementing the electronic submission of White Cards in all housing areas.

CURRENT STATUS:

The CHS Informatics Manager and Information Technology staff are still in the process of finalizing the *MyHealth Online* application for use in the jails. Once completed, CHS plans on initiating a pilot program in one housing area (W4) at the Elmwood Women's Facility to analyze what works/doesn't work prior to implementing it in all housing areas.

CHS also completed the installation of locked White Card boxes in all inmate housing areas to make it easier for inmates to submit White Cards at any time, instead of waiting to hand it to

CHS or Custody staff. In compliance with the Consent Decree, White Cards are collected twice per day.