**HSR&D Future and the Learning Healthcare System**

Health services research in the VA is probably about 30 years old now. We’ve grown from a small number of researchers at a few facilities now to over 250 active projects at over 25 medical centers scattered around the country. Health services research has been with the VA over a number of really important transformations, transformation to a primary care-based system, with networks, the growth of the electronic health record, the transformation of now, more purchased care, under the MISSION Act, and I think that we’re really poised to take the impact of health services up to another level.

One concept that’s been informing my thinking about the role of health services research is the concept of a learning healthcare system. The term, I think, was first introduced by the Institute of Medicine more than a decade ago. I think the VA has lots of elements of a learning healthcare system, and if you think about the definition of a learning healthcare system it’s based on the idea that every encounter with a patient contributes information that we can glean from that information new insights into our care and how to improve the care. And then as we make changes to improve the care and spread that, that gives rise to anew chance to observe what happens and hopefully that continues in a virtual cycle of steady improvement.

I think the VA has a lot of the elements that the IOM called out as an important part of a learning healthcare system, we have more than two decades of data—not only administrative data, but lots of rich clinical data, lab tests, x-rays, pathology reports. It’s got committed leadership and a system of performance measurement and ways to feed that data back. It has a system where the incentives are not to see more patients and make more money, but to do the right thing for the Veteran.