

Point of Care FAQ for Potential Participants

What is Point of Care Research?

VA is introducing a new approach to research that combines research studies with routine medical care. This will help us learn how to best treat and improve the lives of Veterans. Point of Care research provides a new way to compare commonly used treatments to find out if one is more effective than another.

How does Point of Care Research differ from other medical research studies like a clinical trial?

In a clinical trial, researchers study new drugs, medical devices, diagnostic tests, or treatments. Participants have scheduled visits with the researchers in addition to their usual health care provider and often undergo extra tests or procedures for the purpose of the research study.

A Point of Care study will only compare options that are already approved and are being used every day in medical care. Thus, in a Point of Care study, Veterans continue to receive their medical care provided in the usual way at their VA. No separate visits for research are required because researchers will learn about the results of treatment from the usual information entered into the medical record.

How will the Point of Care Research Program help Veterans?

By integrating research into routine medical care, the Point of Care Research program will help VA answer questions faster, and for less money. Results will let doctors know which treatment works best in their patients and guide them in making decisions to ultimately deliver the best care to Veterans.

Haven't drugs already been tested before you start using them? What more information do you need?

Before a new medication is used in everyday healthcare, drug companies are required to prove that it works and that it is safe. They are not always required to compare their drug to others on the market to determine which is more effective. As a result, doctors may have several treatment options available. When there is no clear answer as to which drug is more effective, VA researchers can use a Point of Care research study to learn more and ultimately provide better care to Veterans.

How does a Point of Care Research study work?

You may have a chance to participate in a Point of Care research study while being seen in a clinic or during a hospitalization. This can happen if there are several treatment options available and your doctor does not have a strong preference for one over another. For example, two commonly used medications to treat high blood pressure may be studied to find out which one works best. In this case, if you are willing to participate, you will randomly be assigned to receive one or the other. This helps us make sure that we can compare the two drugs fairly.

Your doctor will still be responsible for making decisions about your medical care, and may even change your medicine if necessary. Researchers will collect information from your electronic medical record and compare the results of the two treatments to identify which works better. After you agree to participate, there are no other study related requirements.

What does participation involve?

Each Point of Care research study will be different. However, similar to any research study, you will be provided with detailed information on what the study entails, including potential risks. If you agree to participate, there will be no additional appointments or tests outside of your routine medical care. Researchers will receive information on your treatment and how it is working from your VA electronic medical record. Although research results may be published or shared with other scientists, your name and identity will never be revealed to anyone outside of VA.

I trust my doctor. Will he or she still take care of me if I am in a Point of Care study?

Yes, your primary care doctor and any specialists you see for care will be responsible for your individual medical needs, whether or not you participate in a Point of Care study.

Will a computer be making decisions about my medical care?

Your doctor will consider the various treatment options available and decide if one is best for you. You will only participate in a Point of Care research study when your doctor has no preference for one treatment over all of the others. In that specific case, the study will randomly assign you to one treatment option. The computer isn't taking the place of doctors; it is just "flipping the coin" for them. Your doctor will still be responsible for making decisions about your medical care.

What are the risks involved?

There are no known medical risks to participating in Point of Care research studies since all treatments being compared in these studies are approved treatments and used in routine care. There is the possibility that you might experience known side effects related to an approved treatment, but these will be explained to you before you decide whether or not to participate. Your doctor will monitor your health as usual and will change your treatment as necessary.