

## DIFFUSION IN ACTION:

# AUTOMATING THE PROSTHETIC LIMB PROCUREMENT PROCESS TO IMPROVE CONTINUITY OF CARE FOR VETERANS

### Challenge

With recent advancements in prosthetic limb technology, Veterans with limb loss have greater promise of increased quality of life, independence, and mobility than ever before. However, the long wait between being prescribed and fitted for a prosthetic limb and finally receiving the limb—in some cases as many as six to twelve months—has compounded the many challenges of limb loss, leading to patient and provider frustration, and, in some cases, despair.

### Innovation

Dr. Jeffrey Heckman, a physician in the VA Puget Sound Health Care System, treated many Veterans frustrated by the lengthy process of receiving their prosthetic limbs. Motivated by one such Veteran, who offered his own technical services to improve the process, Dr. Heckman gathered a team, consisting of prosthetist Wayne Biggs and data system expert Jeffrey Bott, to overhaul and automate the prosthetic limb acquisition process. The result was a system of three interrelated software platforms, known as **FLOW3**, that streamlines and provides transparency into the acquisition flow.

After successful implementation at Puget Sound, the team spread their innovation through the Diffusion of Excellence program, beginning with a partnership with Dawn Schwarten at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and ultimately rolling FLOW3 out across VISN 12.

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With patients lacking mobility and independence due to limb loss at greater risk for depression, PTSD, substance abuse, adjustment disorder, and suicide, reducing wait time for limbs can have a huge impact on Veterans' quality of life, with potential correlations in suicide prevention.

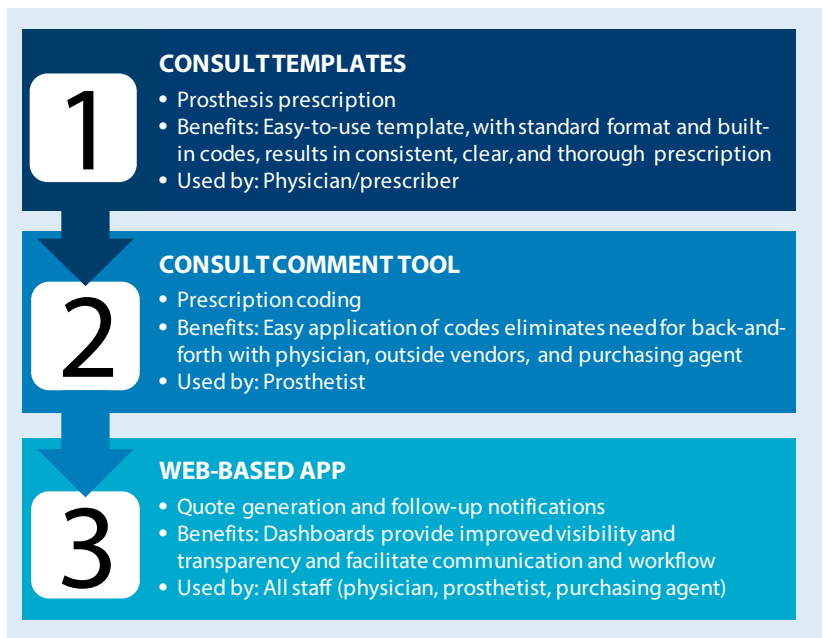
— Dr. Jeff Heckman



## How It Works

FLOW3 is a system of three interrelated software platforms that automate, standardize, and provide transparency into the limb acquisition process. FLOW3 begins in-clinic with physician entry of a prosthesis prescription using the **FLOW Consult Templates**. The order then moves to the prosthetist, who enters the appropriate codes using the **Consult Comment Tool**. Then, purchasing agents use the **Web-based App** to generate the quote for force entry, which contracting staff can access the very next day.

The Web-based App provides dashboards so that all staff can look up order status and move the order through each stage, streamlining the process from start to end. For example, the prosthetist no longer hand-carries paperwork to purchasing agents; this prevents orders from getting lost. Purchasing agents no longer manually shuffle papers; instead, they access a daily list of orders, checking off completed ones, thus, eliminating data entry errors. The dashboard also notifies clinic staff when the Veteran should receive a follow-up, in-clinic evaluation and provides physicians with a display of all a patient's information on one screen, including limbs ordered, outcome measures, prosthesis impact, and any additional prescriptions/therapies ordered.



## Impact

With FLOW3 fully implemented at Puget Sound and across VISN 12, the following benefits have been realized:



### A faster process from prescription (Rx) to purchase order (PO) to limb delivery:

- Rx to PO authorization reduced from **21.3** to **10.3 days** (non-VA providers)
- Variability in timeliness reduced **57%**
- Rx to limb delivery reduced **39-50%**



### Improved communication, patient engagement, and continuity of care:

- More Veterans returning to clinic, excited to receive their prosthetic limbs



### Greater data transparency and accuracy with data mining related to:

- Prosthetics
- Veterans with limb loss
- Current VA services and need for new services

## At Your Facility

As the FLOW3 team prepares for nationwide implementation, they are developing training materials applicable to any facility and broken into modules, so staff members can choose to learn the whole system or just the part that applies to them. The team is also available for coaching, mentoring, and technical troubleshooting during the implementation process. FLOW3 will provide facilities with real-time reports on the number of new prosthetic orders, number of replacements, and length of procurement process, benefitting leadership and frontline staff... and, ultimately, improving the quality of life for Veterans with limb loss.

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

To learn more about FLOW3, contact [VAInnovation@atlasresearch.us](mailto:VAInnovation@atlasresearch.us) or Diffusion Specialist Brian Stevenson at [Brian.Stevenson@va.gov](mailto:Brian.Stevenson@va.gov). Are you interested in learning how to submit your promising practice? Visit the Diffusion of Excellence VA Pulse Page.