

# CROSSING THE EMPATHETIC BRIDGE: Using Evidence-based personas to improve Health Information Technology (HIT) tools for VA Clinicians, Veterans and their Caregivers

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## PERSONAS AT THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Personas are a great way to distill user research, into easily understood, bite size forms. They can include a variety of information, tailored to a particular project and team's needs. This is particularly true with the unique users groups of Veterans, Clinicians and Caregivers. Without understanding the needs, goals and behaviors of these user groups, development teams base design/development decisions upon their own experiences, broader population statistics and anecdotal vignettes. The personas add significant value to the VA because they provide a more accurate representation of the groups for which health information technology (HIT) tools are being developed. Incorporation of user research leads to health IT tools that better serve the needs of the Veterans, Clinicians and Caregivers, and require fewer reworks resulting from misalignment between users' needs and development assumptions.



In the creation and deployment of these personas, the Human Factors Engineering (HFE) team drew upon published data about Veterans, data collected directly from VA clinicians, stakeholder feedback and user group validation. Direct engagement with design/development teams during the creation and iteration of the personas allowed the teams to directly influence the personas available for their use. A pool of archetypes was identified from which a directory of personas can be created as needed. Personas deliver a new and practical tool for designers and developers who must be responsive to complex requirements that can include Congressional mandates and unique interactions between atypical users groups.

## TOUR A VA PERSONA

**Dan Maxwell** Vietnam Era Veteran

*"I use all the forms of technology at work and technology enhances the world for me. Most Vietnam Veterans are at least keyboard literate."*

**My Use of VA Services**

- My Healthcare: Care Management, My Health, Blue Button, Lab Results
- Convenient & PEP
- Disability Reporting from Agent Change Request
- Pre-consulting services
- Insurance for disaster resulting from Agent Change Expense

**My Health Issues**

- Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure
- Chronic respiratory from Agent Change Request

**My Technology Pain Points**

- Don't like that app and website
- Wanted to sign up on
- Need more information on VA website

**My Needs**

- Make an online appointment
- Make an online appointment
- Make an online appointment

**My Technology Desired**

- Mobile App
- Computer Software
- Mobile Phone & Tablet
- Internet Connected
- Health Insurance
- Learning Systems

**My Relationships**

- Spouse
- Children
- Grandchildren
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Colleagues
- Relatives
- Neighbors
- Colleagues
- Relatives

**My Words**

Actual quote from veteran in persona's archetype

**My Name**

Picked from online name generator!

**My Portrait**

Representative view of the persona

**My Adjectives**

Three words to describe the persona's personality and outlook

**My Story**

Narrative about the persona's life and history of military service

**My Technology Knowledge**

Measure of the persona's technology expertise in various areas on a 1-5 scale from beginner to expert

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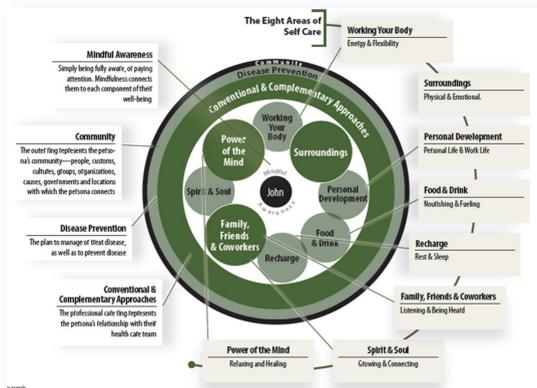
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## A UNIQUE CONTEXT OF USE

**Meghan Gill**

*"I want to be a career person and feel like I'm contributing to society, my community and my family."*

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It is particularly important in the context of use within the VA that the design/development teams understand their Veteran, Clinician and family Caregiver users, who all have unique needs and pain points. Additionally, there is robust interaction between these user groups that can be enhanced or inhibited by the HIT tools designed for their use. When gaps exist in the design/development team's understanding of the users and their interactions, their ability to produce useful HIT products is significantly diminished.

## INNOVATION: THE PERSONA INTERVIEW

In the continuous drive to enhance the empathetic bridge between Veterans, Clinicians and family Caregivers and the HIT design and development teams, HFE has explored some innovative ideas that we believe may be unique in the well-established area of persona development. One of these is the "Persona Interview", which consists of a fictional, yet data-backed and fact-checked, magazine style interview with the personas. The interview provides an even greater opportunity for the teams to connect and empathize with the users for which they are creating HIT tools.

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## THE EMPATHETIC BRIDGE

The VA HFE personas provide a level of unique information that differentiates them from the personas created for broader population of health IT product users. Developed from an exhaustive expanse of user research that included a literature review, stakeholder feedback and Veteran/Clinician validation, these personas are unique to the human factors industry in that they address the specific needs of the Veteran/Clinician and Caregivers they serve. They can be and are being used by various teams in the VA in a variety of ways, such as: 1) to inform user recruitment efforts for usability testing and focus groups, 2) to develop Veteran journey maps for use in Congressional testimony, 3) to act as stand-ins for users during heuristic reviews, 4) as the subject of user stories for Agile development teams, 5) and posted as hard copy "Information Radiators" in developer and team workspaces.

**em-pa-thy** n. \em-pa-thē\ the ability to step into the shoes of another person, understand their feelings and perspectives, and to use that understanding to guide actions.\*

**"I have a very heavy workload and need to be able to quickly filter that list."**

**"Dan might have some trouble right here."**

**"Thanks, guys!"**

**DRAFT**