

Audio Transcription

Season /Episode #:	Season 1 Episode 5
Guest:	Jason Cave
Title:	A VA Facility Director's perspective on Virtual Care

Doctor Maia Carter	Hello, my name is Doctor Maia Carter and welcome to Let's Talk Virtual Care podcast episode five Jason Cave, a VA facility medical directors' perspective on virtual care. Each episode unpacks key approaches for operationalizing virtual care from exceptional VA staff and health care innovators. You will gain valuable, timely insights for the mobilization of virtual tools for veteran health and well-being.
Doctor Maia Carter	This blog was produced by the Office of Primary Care Virtual Care Integration Team. Jason Cave was appointed Acting Medical Center Director for the South Texas VA on in June of 2022, with a fiscal year 22 budget of nearly \$1.4 billion and 4800 employees, Mr. Cave oversees the care services for nearly 111,000 veterans. In 2019, he served as a director of the West Texas VA, a highly rural area serving 22,000 veterans and 55,000 square miles
Doctor Maia Carter	Before joining the West Texas VA, Mr. Cave served as Assistant Director at the VA in Philadelphia. His VA career started 11 years ago as a Presidential Management Fellow. He served in various capacities over the years, including health system specialist, financial manager, general attorney, public affairs officer and emergency manager. Mr. cave is a graduate of business Sports Leadership Development Institute, class of 2013, VA leadership, VA class of 2016 and VA Health Care Leadership Development Program where I met Mr. Cave and we are both graduates of the class of 2019.
Doctor Maia Carter	And one fun fact about Mr. Cave is that he loves playing virtual reality games with his family and friends across the country because as a director, he is always on the move. Hi Mr. Cave, so nice that you could join us today.
Jason Cave	Thank you so much for having me and appreciate that introduction. Always makes me sound like I know a lot more than I really do, but, appreciate the opportunity and, love the program, so I'm just excited to be a part of it.
Doctor Maia Carter	Thank you. We're excited to have you. And we're learning that, you know, what it takes to have the effectiveness, the sustainability, the scalability of virtual care. And we also know that it takes really great executive team sponsorship in order for virtual care to be a success. So, let's jump in. So, Mr. Cave, when you think about virtual care and, the tools used to take care of our veterans, what does that mean through the lens of a facility director?

Doctor Maia Carter	As far as the bottom line, what does that mean to you operationally as far as reaching your goals as a facility director?
Jason Cave	Absolutely. Great question. So, you know, everybody will say telehealth virtual care modalities is the future, right. But I also want to point out it's not just the future for tech reasons or because of modernization. It's there because it's an invaluable tool in our portfolio. It's a way we can provide different types of care to veterans in ways that we otherwise might be unable to.
Jason Cave	You mentioned West Texas, you know, Big Spring there. It's so rural there. Sometimes veterans might have to drive more than two, 2.5 hours to get to a VA site. Telehealth modalities allow us to stay connected in ways we might otherwise not be able to, and if I could, I would just say, you know, think about with VHA, VA being so big, so integrated and us having these tools that we do have, right.
Jason Cave	There's a future where you could have any specialist anywhere in our system connect with any veteran anywhere else. And while we're still in the stages of establishing those networks and those referral patterns and connecting everyone, think about down the road where we might be able to just connect any veteran with any provider who's available, no matter where everybody's located.
Jason Cave	So, I know that's kind of a bold and ambitious plan. You mentioned the business processes and the bottom line too, so I really want to applaud some of our colleagues who work at either the Allocation Resource Center or other arms of Veterans Health Administration that look at funding mechanisms, because it used to be the case that you would say, well, we don't get as much workload credit or maybe as much funding for a telehealth or a virtual care visit.
Jason Cave	I have to say, there's been a lot of hard work done on that. And in fact, we're seeing some of those mechanisms catch up to virtual care. So as a director, we're not I'm not as worried about the impact on the bottom line. It's much more about the Veteran's experience because as we know, veterans have choices if they don't choose to come to VA, ultimately we won't stay in business forever.
Jason Cave	So those business processes and reimbursement are catching up. And this is an invaluable tool.
Doctor Maia Carter	Fantastic. You know, it sounds like you are an advocate for virtual care and the ability of using these tools to reach Veterans as they connect with

	Veterans to whom we perhaps wouldn't otherwise have as a closer connection with. And so, leveraging these tools is a Veteran centric approach. And, I know myself and my team are definitely right there looking at the financial pieces of virtual care as well, and understanding the full capacity of how that affects things as well.
Doctor Maia Carter	You know, we're in this space now as we move forward from the Covid 19 emergency response, where now we have staff that are reflecting on lockdown, their life. You know, how they want to work, how they want to live. What does that look like? Many of us have lost loved ones through the Covid pandemic and, kind of re-examining work.
Doctor Maia Carter	And so, what do you think would be one of the great strategies that would work for recruitment efforts and retention efforts?
Jason Cave	Yeah, absolutely. And this is where technology has to play a key role. so as you pointed out, a lot of people, you know, you've heard about and there's a lot of literature out there about the so-called Great Resignation. You know, so many people are really reevaluating their lives, like you said, looking for work life balance in a way that meets their goals in life differently from how we looked at it before the pandemic.
Jason Cave	So, you know, so many people ever want to stay in the workforce. Demographic statistics. There are so many health care employees, retirement eligible, right? So, we need to get ahead of that and make sure that we're a best place to work from every last avenue. But what seems to be one of the most critical determinants of those decisions includes telework and virtual flexibility.
Jason Cave	I think all of us, when we've been standing around a kitchen table talking with our families about possible other jobs, is that not always a big part of the conversation? It's like, well, good. Could we remote connect some of the time? What flexibility could I have? Maybe it's a tour and you say I could work earlier in the day and get off earlier so that we could balance childcare, whatever it is.
Jason Cave	You know, so to say all that I say, these are incredible tools again, that we need to use to support people's work life balance. And the silver lining on, as you pointed out, throughout the pandemic, one of the silver linings was that the skeptics of telework, and I'll count myself as I was probably 70% of a skeptic of it before the pandemic, where you said, you know, you have to be here in person, how can it really work otherwise?

Jason Cave	The pandemic taught us, taught us to the contrary. You can have people at least a portion of time. Obviously, as a 24 seven hospital, we need people here. That's not to say that every role can't be examined critically for what is the opportunity, if any, to flex that out and better support the person holistically? I think that's key.
Jason Cave	And if we don't as an agency get ahead of this, you know, we're already competing with each other and with, private sector health care for the same limited number of specialists and nurses and doctors. So, we've got to get ahead of that. It's one of the tools we do have and we better use it.
Doctor Maia Carter	I love what you said about supporting our staff holistically. Right. So, you know, we bring all of us to work, you know, all of our all of our pieces come to work with us. And being able to create a work environment that will retain staff, that will honor this work life home situation is where we're at. We're at the point where it's critical now that we, you know, think out of the box and start offering, flexibility.
Doctor Maia Carter	So, I agree. Fantastic. So, you know via Video Connect that is a primary tool we're using to connect with veterans. As you mentioned earlier, in the rural areas or even in the urban areas. And to, be able to have this another lane of effort to stay connected with our veterans. What are your thoughts on VA Video Connect?
Jason Cave	So, it's definitely a step better than a phone visit. That's undeniable. Right? Like here on our program that we're on right now. If you couldn't see us, if it was just audio, it would be a little bit different. Right? That's what we're seeing. There's that additional layer. Everyone you know has heard some crazy percentage of communication is nonverbal I don't know, 80% something like that.
Jason Cave	Right. So, it lets you see a window into that veteran into that provider, you know, depending on which end you're on, it lets you see a window into that person. You wouldn't get over the phone. It's not 100% the same as being there in person, but it's much better than just an audio connection. And, you know, some of the unique, maybe, unforeseen benefits that I'll call attention to is that with a veteran connecting through VA video connect from home, the provider is able to see a window into their home situation that you certainly wouldn't in the office.
Jason Cave	What's their living room look like? Do they have enough space? Does it look cluttered? Is there a problem? Are you wearing five blankets because the heater broke? You know, it lets you see a window into their holistic health

	picture that maybe we wouldn't have otherwise seen. So innovative tool. you know, our veterans are always sensitive. From what I hear.
Jason Cave	They don't want to ever see face to face completely replaced. But once you have that face-to-face relationship and now we're following up about my health concern and we're following up about something, this tool is almost as good as being there in person. And a lot better than just a phone visit.
Doctor Maia Carter	Absolutely agree 100%. You know, with VA Video Connect, the intention is not to replace in-person and care as just another way to connect, right? We want our veterans to have a robust array of mechanisms to connect to their health care team, whether that be, in person, whether that be VA Video Connect, whether that be through My Healthe Vet.
Doctor Maia Carter	Right. And secure messaging. And to have that, reliable connection is key. And myself and my team are fortunate to be able to work with Office of Connect to Care to help streamline, some of the challenges or barriers that may come up with VA Video Connect to make it optimal for the end user. And I lastly, I wanted to ask you about space as a facility medical director.
Doctor Maia Carter	What does it mean to you to really optimize space and leverage it to the max?
Jason Cave	Oh, this one's always a little controversial. In my time in VA, it's rare that you ever find someone that will tell you, as a director, we're thoroughly satisfied with the space we have. In fact, I'm not sure that's ever happened. So, you know, we tend to think we always need more. And in a lot of growing markets, we do need more.
Jason Cave	It's not just a perception. Right. But the big challenge. There's a couple going on here. One is breaking ourselves out of that traditional mindset that everybody needs to have an office that's just your office, and then everybody needs to have an exam room, that's just your exam room or whatever it is. You know, we've got to channel into that, especially as we're pairing this up with telework flexibilities and some of those things.
Jason Cave	If somebody is teleworking, somebody else should be able to use that space. And that sounds very straightforward, but I'm definitely here to tell you I have experienced it's not that easy. I know it's not. So, I don't mean to oversimplify, but, you know, to the question, it means we need to use the space we have, even while we seek additional space or ask for more.
Jason Cave	You know, we had a previous VA secretary who would come to the facilities on Friday afternoons late in the afternoon when we would say we needed

	more space and he'd walk around. And I think everybody of my colleagues out there know tend to be pretty quiet at that hour of the day. I'll also share. We had a very busy clinic at one of the systems that I've served that was growing, and in one part of the clinic, people were so busy.
Jason Cave	It was at the lab waiting room. It was jammed. You know, everybody was in their really high-capacity parts of that clinic. Doors were locked, lights are off, and no one's home. So, it requires us to be colleagues with each other. Right. And so, you know, if somebody used your space when you were out of office, I think we're where we all need to get individual, you know, the whole be the change you want to see, right..
Jason Cave	Other people I as a director have to say if I'm teleworking or if I'm out of the office, go ahead and use my office. Use the boardroom, whatever it is you need to do. And if that happens, instead of being defensive and siloed and fighting those turf wars, it's more of a it needs to be used again, back to what is best for the veterans there.
Jason Cave	If we can provide a better experience and decompress some waiting rooms or provide more of a personalized or maybe even a little more space to discuss a sensitive issue, that's going to be a better experience. So, it's a little bit distasteful when you say you used to have a private office, and now it's only going to be kind of touch down space model when you're in the office.
Jason Cave	But where I think we have the opportunity then is to pair that with those telework flexibilities. So, you may not have a dedicated office anymore, but you get to work from home, you know, a couple of days a week or whatever it may be. So, I think those are palatable. If you if you marry those two up there.
Doctor Maia Carter	Absolutely. You know, finding that win win, right. And being able to have that flexibility and say, you know what, we don't have this private office, but, you know, we do offer you some flexibility at work. And I love that, how you mentioned that, you know, accountability on all levels where it's not just a front-line thing, you know, we've got to be flexible with space, but on the management level and even on the executive level, really being able to demonstrate, what that looks like.
Doctor Maia Carter	And we're all in this together. And so, I think that's where we go. Who knows? There could be opportunities to bring in specialty services to the CBOC where perhaps it will cut down on community care costs. I mean, you know, just really being able to be creative, and have a mindset shift around space is where we're going.

Jason Cave	Absolutely. And right back to telework or telehealth again. Two, we'd have specialized equipment based on the specialties. So, we'll probably see more telehealth capable and telehealth intensive rooms instead of rooms dedicated maybe for different things. But it all gets back to that flexibility and ultimately the outcome and the experience for the veteran. That's key. So appreciate.
Doctor Maia Carter	It. Okay. Well, this has been fantastic. I really enjoyed our conversation and really understanding from a facility director's lens. What that means to have virtual care for our veterans and what it means for staff. And so I want to close our conversation today with a topic that's very important to me. And it's joy. And when you have joy in your life, and I believe when you do things and activities that bring you joy, you're better for yourself and you're better for those around you.
Doctor Maia Carter	So when I reflect on myself, music brings me joy. Activity brings me joy. Being able to, listen to live music, dance, exercise with music all that brings me joy and brings me life. And I'm a better person for myself and those around me, my family and friends. So, Mr. Cave, what brings you joy?
Jason Cave	You got it. Well, most of those things also bring me joy. but I have to share with the audience, too, that one of the things that you're so blessed as a director to be able to see is that you get to see firsthand the difference that VA is making in the lives of veterans, in the lives of individuals.
Jason Cave	So, when I can look and see the tangible results of those efforts and everything everyone's doing that renews me, that brings me joy. You will hear stories in every VA in this country right now. I guarantee you it's going on right now. There's a veteran who was at a place in their behavioral health and their mental health where they felt like they were in total despair, but because of the counseling and the services from VA, they feel like they're in a place of hope.
Jason Cave	That transformation cannot be overstated. Same with our infrastructure. You know, we have facilities that used to be 75 years old, maybe didn't work too well. And now you see veterans in modern, beautiful spaces that are conducive to a healing environment to care. That's joy. And then, you know, just looking at our data as well, I'm a bit of a data geek and looking at some of these things like our trust scores.
Jason Cave	And you say, listen to people tell you that despite all these things that have been going on, the pandemic and everything else, they trust their provider with their health care, with their life. That's what it's all about. And we get to see those. And to me, those are renewing and they make up for any, any

	amount of frustration and challenges far and away are made up by that change you see in people's lives.
Jason Cave	So that's as joyous as it gets.
Doctor Maia Carter	Oh, fantastic. it's good to hear that through the pandemic and through it all. You know, our trust scores remain strong. And also, you mentioned, something else that resonated with me, the mental and emotional wellness of our veterans. I was fortunate enough just recently to participate in the development of virtual tools for mental health. So, apps and other tools and assessment tools that our veterans can tap into in between visits.
Doctor Maia Carter	Right. to be able to really continue to cope and support themselves through whatever it is anxiety, depression, PTSD, in between those clinic visits, in between those video visits, to really be able to support them throughout the continuum of their life. So it's not just in the clinic, it's not just on the video. It's, you know, in their everyday activities.
Doctor Maia Carter	And so, I always say health happens at home. And, that little bit of time that we have with them is great. And it's awesome, but they spend so much time away from the health care team and to be able to optimize tools, and virtual care helps to do that, you know, is where we need to continue to go.
Jason Cave	So yeah, you're so right. And I mean, that's the exciting aspect of the future too, with wearable technology and all these other different things, people are tracking their sleep and their heart rates and all this when you think about whole health, you know, and supporting someone. I like that health happens at the home. So, we need to have apps, we need to have text, we need to have chats,
Jason Cave	we need to have face to face. We got to be there. Wherever veterans are.
Doctor Maia Carter	And also have the underbelly of the privacy, the security, all those different pieces to make sure it's reliable and it's safe as well. Well, this has been just phenomenal. It's been a pleasure to have you on the show. Thank you for your time and let's stay connected. Thank you for joining us on this episode of Let's Talk Virtual Care.
Doctor Maia Carter	I hope that you found it inspiring and value added. As you work to integrate virtual tools into your workspace, we welcome your ideas, your thoughts, and your suggestions for future episodes. You can view this episode or look at prior episodes by looking at our MS Streams channel. Just search. Let's Talk Virtual Care. Please share this blog with your friends and your colleagues.

Doctor Maia Carter	We look forward to seeing you on the next episode of Let's Talk Virtual Care. I'm Doctor Maia Carter and remember dare to be innovative.