RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA

Data Issues Brief   October 2003

1. New VIReC Research Users Guide: VHA Pharmacy Prescription Data

A beta version of the *VIReC Research User Guide: VHA Pharmacy Prescription Data* is now available on the VIReC Web site at http://www.virec.research.va.gov. This guide describes the sources of VA patient-level prescription data available to researchers. It also provides detailed descriptions of variables in the Pharmacy Benefits Management (PBM) Database and the recently released Decision Support Services (DSS) National Data Extracts (NDE) Pharmacy SAS® Datasets.   VIReC encourages researchers to take a look at the guide and send any comments, corrections, and suggestions to virec@research.hines.va.gov.

2. VBA BIRLS Death File Updated

In August 2003 the Austin Automation Center (AAC) completely refreshed the Beneficiary Identification Records Locator System (BIRLS) Death SAS dataset. This dataset contains veteran patient deaths reported to the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). Previously, although the dataset was updated on a regular basis with information received from the VBA, any death information potentially misreported was not removed from the dataset. Henceforth, the BIRLS Death SAS dataset will be refreshed on a regular basis every January. The SAS refreshed dataset name is MDPPRD.PRO.SAS.VHA.BIRLS.DEATHS(0). A copy was made of the BIRLS Death SAS dataset before it was refreshed, and it is named MDPPRD.PRO.SAS.VHA.BIRLS.DEATHS.AUG03. Any questions in regards to this dataset should be directed to the AAC Help Desk at 1-800-883-4100 or ahd@mail.va.gov.

3. VHA HDR/CPRS-Reengineering Newsletter

The Summer 2003 edition of the *HDR/CPRS-R Newsletter* has been posted to the VA Intranet. This edition highlights HDR data mapping operations designed to provide consistent clinical data across all VA medical facilities. Care Management is described as the first module released by the CPRS-Re-engineering team and the first designed to work within the HeltheVet Desktop. The newsletter can be viewed at ███ .

4. VHA Health Information Management Newsletter

The July-September 2003 issue of *Close Encounters*, Health Information Management's newsletter, includes an overview of telemedicine care and how it is coded to capture this workload. The newsletter also reports on Code Set Versioning (CSV), which will bring VistA into compliance with HIPAA requirements that diagnostic and procedure codes used for billing must be the codes that were valid at the time of the health care encounter. *Close Encounters* is on the VA Intranet at ██ .

5. Release of AHRQ Inpatient Quality Indicators Version 2.1 Revision 2

AHRQ has announced an update of the Inpatient Quality Indicators (IQI), Version 2.1, Revision 1, that incorporates changes to ICD-9-CM codes and DRGs effective 10/1/03 (FY2002) and 10/1/02 (FY2003). With this update the IQI definitions now incorporate ICD-9-CM codes valid from October 1, 1994,

through September 30, 2003. All updated IQI documentation and software are available for download on the AHRQ website http://www.qualityindicators.ahrq.gov/data/hcup/inpatqi.htm#download

6. AcademyHealth Cyber Seminars in Health Services Research Methods

October 10, 2003, is the deadline for early registration (reduced rate) for the AcademyHealth 2003-2004 cyber seminars series. Faculty for the first three sessions (October, November, and December 2003) is John Ware, PhD, well known as principal investigator for the Medical Outcomes Study (MOS), which developed the SF-36 Health Survey. 2004 seminars will address the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), Geographic Information Systems (GIS), measuring health benefits, and the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS). Full information on the 2003-2004 seminar series is at http://www.academyhealth.org/CYBERSEMINARS/live/courses.htm.

7. CMS ResDAC Training October 27-29, 2003

The Research Data Assistance Center (ResDAC) provides free assistance to academic, government, and non-profit researchers interested in using Medicare and/or Medicaid data for research. ResDAC will be conducting a training session entitled "CMS 101: Introduction to the Use of Medicare Data for Research" October 27-29, 2003, at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN. This workshop will familiarize attendees with the use of Medicare administrative data for research. The course will cover the origin, flow, quality, and research applications of Medicare data. For more information, check the ResDAC Web site at http://www.resdac.umn.edu/ and click on "Training."