



VA Information Resource Center
A VA HSR&D Service Resource Center

Data Issues Brief
April, 2002

1. Publication of Proposed Changes to HIPAA Privacy Standards

On March 27 proposed changes to the HIPAA privacy standards were published in the Federal Register. There is a 30-day public comment period. Information about the proposed changes and an electronic comment process can be found at:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/>.

Of particular note to researchers, the new proposed changes would assure privacy, without impeding some research. The proposal would eliminate the need for researchers to use multiple consent forms -- one for informed consent to the research and one or more related to information privacy rights. Instead, researchers could use a single combined form to accomplish both purposes. For more information about the proposed changes and the potential impact on research and other aspects go to: <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/>.

Information about subscribing to an email listserv providing up to date information on the latest HIPAA updates and news is the "HIPAA-REGS@LIST.NIH.GOV", and can be found at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/admsimp/lnotify.htm>

2. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Privacy Office Provides Tools in Determining HIPAA Compliance

To assist Veterans Integrated Service Networks, VA Medical Centers and other VHA offices, the VHA Privacy Office has developed tools for assessing responsibility for compliance with the HHS Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information. More information about the Privacy Checklist and other tools to assist in determining a VA organizational entity's compliance with privacy requirements can be obtained from the VHA Privacy Office at (727) 320-1839.

In the near future VIREC will publish tools specific to research use of individual health data and HIPAA compliance issues.

3. The VA Information Technology Conference (ITC) August 2002 Cancelled.

The annual VA ITC was cancelled this year. For more information refer to URL:

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4. The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Releases New Data Warehouse

The NCHS announced a new release of data in the Data Warehouse on Trends in Health and Aging (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/agingact.htm>). The new release contains Home Health Care data by the type of the service from The National Home and Hospice Care Survey; Emergency Room data by reason for visit (illness or injury); and updated data from The Bureau of The Census (Living Arrangements), and data on self-assessed health status from National Health Interview Survey and Behavior Risk Factors Surveillance System. Data on functional limitations of older adults from the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey are being developed and will be released in the future.

5. New Variables added to the VA Medical SAS Outpatient Datasets

Starting with FY 2002, two new variables to support new eligibility for treatment of cancer of the head or neck associated with a veteran's receipt of nasopharyngeal radium irradiation treatments during active military, naval, or air service (Public Law 105-368 – November 11, 1998) was added to the National Patient Care Dataset and the Medical SAS Outpatient Visit (SF) and Medical SAS Outpatient Event (SE) datasets:

Added to the Visit (SF) dataset:

Claimed Nose/Throat Radium Treatment (NTRIND) - This variable indicates whether the patient claimed nasopharyngeal radium irradiation treatment during active military service; formatted values: 0="NO," 1="YES".

Added to the Event (SE) dataset:

Nose/Throat Radium Treatment Indicator (NTRENC) - This variable indicates whether there was treatment given for nasopharyngeal radium irradiation treatment exposure; formatted values: "0"="NTR CLAIMED TRTMNT NOT REL TO NTR", "1"="NTR CLAIMED TRTMNT REL TO NTR", other="DOES NOT CLAIM NTR".

More detailed technical documentation about this change to the NPCD and SAS extracts is provided in Software Design Description (SDD) documents available from the VHA Office of Information, National Data Systems.

6. Upcoming Research Meetings:

- Society for Clinical Trials 2002 Annual Meeting, May 12-15th at Hyatt Regency, Arlington, VA.
URL: <http://www.sctweb.org/meeting.cfm>
- International Society of Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) 7th Annual Conference, May 19-22nd at Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Arlington, VA.
URL: http://www.ispor.org/meetings/va0502/index_new.htm
- Association for Health Services Research and Health Policy, June 23-25th at the Hilton Washington, Washington D.C
URL: <http://www.academyhealth.org/2002/hotel/index.htm>

Data Issues Briefs are developed by the staff of the VA Information Resource Center (VIREC) for the purpose of informing and updating VA researchers on current and pending happenings and changes regarding health data, databases, and medical informatics. *Data Issues Briefs* are produced on a monthly basis and are distributed through e-mail subscriptions. Previous releases are posted and available on the VIREC Web site at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov>. If you wish to receive future issues directly or have any suggestions or comment about the *Data Issues Briefs*, please send an e-mail message to the VIREC at virec@research.hines.va.gov or call (708) 202-2413.