VIReC RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA

Data Issues Brief   June 2004

1. HIPAA Privacy Issues For Researchers Requesting Date or Confirmation of Death

VA researchers with protocols that anticipate requesting death data from VBA (i.e., BIRLS) or the National Death Index (NDI) or even the Social Security Administration (SSA) may be at risk of a HIPAA Privacy Rule violation. The VBA, NDI, and SSA usually require that requestors submit SSN or other identifying information to ensure that they return the most accurate possible data in response. The transfer of such information from VHA to these entities (yes, even VBA) is a "disclosure" of protected health information—that means you must have some explicit permission to disclose that information. The simplest way to accomplish this is by ensuring that your "waiver of authorization" granted by the IRB covers disclosures to these entities. Spell out in your request for waiver of authorization what information you will be disclosing, to whom you intend to send it, and why it is necessary to do so. Make sure you will be sending the "minimum necessary" amount of information to the external data source. Once the IRB grants your waiver, you can safely disclose the information to the external organizations. But remember: the Privacy Rule requires VHA to account for all disclosures of information. Check with your local privacy officer to determine your responsibility in tracking these types of disclosures.

2. SAS® Proc Contents for VA Data at AAC Now Online

National Data Systems, VHA Health Data and Informatics Program, has put the Proc Contents for all SAS® files housed at the Austin Automation Center on the VA Intranet. See ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ .

3. *VA Health Care Atlas* on Internet

The *VA Health Care Atlas FY2000* has been posted on the Internet in 15 PDF files. The *Atlas* provides a profile of the veteran population from Census 2000; information on VA medical facilities; a summary of the FY2000 VA enrolled population; data on overall VA utilization in FY2000; and FY2000 patterns of VA health care utilization and cost in the nine disease areas addressed by the Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI). The *VA Health Care Atlas FY2000* is available at http://www.vard.org/rorc/VA_healthcare_atlas.htm.

4. Two New VHA Handbooks of Interest to Researchers

On April 15, 2004, VHA issued Handbook 1907.1, *Health Information Management and Healthcare Records*, addressing basic health information procedures for managing the patient health record. Major revisions addressed health record documentation requirements, management of the health record, and management of health information. The handbook includes a section entitled "Research, Clinical Trials, and Experimentation." It is available on the Internet at http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/handbook/1907.1HK4-15-04.pdf.

Researchers using VHA Decision Support System (DSS) data will find the VHA Handbook 1750.1, *VHA Product Departments and Clinical Production Units*, issued May 10, 2004, a valuable reference. The handbook specifies standardized codes for VHA Product Departments (clinical work groups) and products. These codes are utilized in VHA financial reporting in general and in the DSS data specifically. The handbook is available at http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/handbook/1750.1HK5-10-04.pdf .

5. News About VA Information Technology Conference

Online registration is open for the 2004 VA Information Technology Conference to be held in Austin, TX, August 9-12, 2004. Registration for hands-on classes will open June 15. To register, see ███████████████████. A VIReC session (#4560) entitled "New Tools for Using VA Data: A Report from the VA Information Resource Center" will be presented on Thursday, August 12, 10:30-11:30 AM (Room 18B). Presenters will talk about the DSS clinical National Data Extracts, VA pharmacy data, and VA Medicare data for researchers.

6. Presentations from VA _e_Health University (Formerly Camp CPRS) Online

The Office of Information's Physician and Clinical Informatics Training Program, named VHA eHealth University, was held May 24-27, 2004. Information from presentations (handouts, slides, and transcriptions of question-and-answer periods) are now available at ████████████████████ under the top navigation bar button "Class Information." Double click "Class Information" and then choose the presentations of interest.