

1. Procedures for Collecting New Data, Including Race and Ethnicity

On August 4, 2004, VHA issued Directive 2004-041, "Implementation of the VA Form 10-10EZ, Revised Application for Health Benefits, and VA Form 10-10EZR, Health Benefits Renewal Form." The directive describes new procedures for collecting data from veterans applying for health benefits on their race and ethnicity, mother's maiden name, place of birth, e-mail address, previous locations of VA health care, combat service, nose and throat radium exposure, Purple Heart medal status, and health care appointment request information. The directive states that the new information from these forms is to be entered into VistA, but there is no indication in the directive about the availability of data fields in national datasets housed at the Austin Automation Center. (See item 2, below.) The directive and forms are at <http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12004041.pdf>.

2. New VHA Data on Combat Veterans

Beginning on July 10, 2004, three new variables are reported in the VHA Medical SAS Datasets: COMBAT, indicator of whether or not the veteran is eligible for care because of service within a combat zone; COMBAT_DT, the last day of the veteran's two-year period of eligibility for care because of service within a combat zone; and COMBAT_CARE, indicator that a given health care encounter was combat veteran related. For inpatients, all three variables are in the Main and Census files. For outpatients, COMBAT and COMBAT_DT are in the Visit file, and COMBAT_CARE is in the Event file. The data are being collected in accordance with VHA Directive 2002-049, "Combat Veterans Are Eligible for Medical Services for 2-Years After Separation From Military Service Notwithstanding Lack Of Evidence For Service Connection," issued September 11, 2002 (available at <http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12002049.pdf>).

3. VIREC Research User Guide to DSS Clinical National Data Extracts

The new research user guide to the VHA Decision Support System clinical National Data Extracts as a PDF document. is released for beta testing on the VIREC Web site. VIREC's newest guide describes the DSS system and provides variable-level documentation of the clinical NDEs: Laboratory (LAB), Laboratory Results (LAR), Pharmacy (PHA), and Radiology (RAD). Comments on the guide during beta testing are welcomed. See <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/References/RUG/RUG-DSS01-03.pdf>.

4. New Navigation Being Tested For VIREC Web Site

A beta test version of VIREC Web site itself shows improved navigation in response to comments and suggestions received since the current site was introduced in March 2004. New features include a revised site index and search function, "breadcrumbs" that show users their location in the site, and simplified navigation bars at the top and left sides of all pages. The beta test version of the VIREC Web site can be accessed via the current site at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov>.

5. Self-reported Height and Weight Data for Veterans from CDC

The VHA Seattle Epidemiology Research Information Center (ERIC) recently noted, on the HSRData Listserv, that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2003 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data include self-reported height and weight for respondents, as well as whether or not respondents are U.S. military veterans. See <http://www.cdc.gov/BRFSS>. Epidemiology-related technical assistance in using the BRFSS data can be requested from the ERIC Technical Assistance Coordinator, Nick Smith, Ph.D. (nlsmith@u.washington.edu).

6. AHRQ-Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project 2002 Nationwide Inpatient Sample Data

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) announced that the HCUP Nationwide Inpatient Sample (NIS) data from 2002 are available. The 2002 NIS contains new severity of illness variables of hospital inpatient stays. More information about the NIS and how to order the data can be found at: <http://www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/home.jsp>. Selected data from the 2002 NIS are available from HCUPnet at: <http://hcup.ahrq.gov/HCUPnet.asp>.

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