



1. VIREC Bids Farewell to Technical Services Director

Linda Kok is retiring from the VA Information Resource Center on April 1, 2005. When she came to VIREC in October 2001, a server for the VA Medicare Data Merge Initiative was being set up and one file of Medicare data had been received. During Linda's tenure, the project achieved state-of-the-art hardware and software capabilities, a skilled and dedicated team of analysts was hired, detailed policies and procedures were put in place and received external review and affirmation, more than 40 data files were received and prepared for distribution, and over 35 VA researchers received Medicare data at no direct cost to their projects. Linda played a key role in liaison with the office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health and the VHA Data Consortium. She helped VIREC to become identified with the highest standards of technical knowledge and judgment in data management circles of the VHA. Linda's colleagues at Hines VA Hospital will gather on March 31 to thank her for her special contributions to VIREC, HSR&D, and the VA and to wish her a very happy retirement. Until Linda's position is filled, VIREC analyst Noreen Arnold will handle most duties of the role.

2. New Medical SAS Dataset at AAC

Announcement of the new Professional Services (Inpatient Encounters) SAS file at Austin is on the VHA Intranet in the NPCD Audit Trail of Changes at [REDACTED]. The VIREC Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) received the following information from member John Quinn, Director of National Data Systems:

"Before the release of patch SD*5.3*387 (installed at VAMCs by Jan 14, 2005), any admitted patient receiving either care in an outpatient clinic or in a ward did not have encounter data transmitted to NPCD. Because of the goals of the Specialty Physician Productivity Work Group, patch 387 was released. The real intent was to first capture data from the Surgery Package, but many sites do not have the automatic data transfer from the Surgical Package to PCE turned on. This will be made automatic with the release of a patch through Clinical Indicators Data Capture (CIDC) sometime in April. MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.IE05 is scheduled for availability on Tuesday, March 22nd and then every two weeks. It is available the opposite week of the SE file. The IE05 file is modeled after the SE05 file."

Prospective users of the Professional Services SAS file should be cautioned that not all issues related to the contents and use of the dataset are resolved and improvements are being made.

3. DSS Matters Newsletter

The latest issue of the DSS newsletter, for February-March 2005, describes two data quality improvement programs. The DSO Database Development group at Bedford is working with the VHA Office of Care Coordination and the VHA Telemental Health Field Workgroup to improve and standardize data capture for telemental health services. In a second effort, the DSO is working with the VHA Laboratory Program Office Laboratory Management Index Program (LMIP) to identify inappropriate entries in the LMIP productivity and DSS product databases. A quarterly report helps facilities to make corrections. *DSS Matters* is available on the VA Intranet at [REDACTED].

4. VistAWeb Potentially Useful for Researchers

The Office of Information has released VistAWeb, a Web-based alternative to Remote Data View, a VistA application that provides rapid access to patient data across VHA and in Department of Defense (DoD) health records. Remote Data View provides local and remote data on individuals who are patients at the user's home site. Researchers and others with Special User access to VistAWeb can retrieve data from multiple sites and DoD without restriction to those who are patients at the user's home site. VistAWeb Special User access requires a CPRS/VistA logon and access code and approval by the user's local Information Security Officer. See the VistAWeb User's Manual (on the VA intranet at http://www.va.gov/vdl/VistA_Lib/Clinical/VistaWeb/VistAWebUserManual.pdf) for more on Special User access and for the list of reports available through VistAWeb. VistAWeb inquiries may be directed to Bill Rogers at 301-734-0170.

5. My Health_eVet Development News

Investigators interested in patient self-management and recruitment of subjects via the Internet may be especially interested in the new MY_HEALTHEVET_L listserv. Started by the My Health_eVet Project Team, it will distribute announcements of new functionalities and new tools, as well as other newsworthy items about My Health_eVet implementation. To subscribe, go to the VA Intranet site at [REDACTED]. To see the current My Health_eVet, see http://www.myhealthvet.va.gov/MHV.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=MHV_book and the Intranet product site at [REDACTED].

6. Three HSR&D Cyber Seminars in April

The Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D) cyber seminars series will present three sessions in April. They are:

- April 6 HERC Health Economics Course: Session 3
 Forest Baker, PhD, presenter
- April 13 VIReC Overview of VA Databases for Research
 Denise M. Hynes, PhD, MPH, RN, presenter
- April 20 HERC Health Economics Course: Session 4
 Ciaran Phibbs, PhD, presenter

Full information and instructions for registration can be obtained by taking the "Upcoming" link at <http://hsrd.webex.com>.

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO DISSEMINATE TO COLLEAGUES! *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 monthly. All issues are available on the VIReC Web site at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov>. If you wish to receive email notification of future issues or have any suggestions or comment about the *Data Issues Briefs*, please send an e-mail message to the VIReC at virec@va.gov or call (708) 202-2413.