

1. HSR&D 2006 Cyber Seminars on VA Databases and Methods Offered by VIREC

Faculty from VIREC will present this series of monthly informational seminars to assist VA researchers in accessing and using VA databases for research. Seminars are held on the first Tuesday of the month 1-2 PM (Eastern). Upcoming sessions include:

March 7: "Introduction to VIREC Tools for Using VA Databases," Denise Hynes, PhD, RN

This session will provide an overview of the tools and resources available from VIREC, and how to access these resources on the VIREC Web site. Topics include:

- Comparison of VHA Decision Support System and Pharmacy Benefits Management databases
- Documentation of the VHA Enrollment database that is used to produce data for VHA reports
- Description of Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey and U.S. Renal Data System files which are now available, in addition to the Medicare enrollment and utilization data, from VIREC through the VA Medicare Data Merge Initiative (including how to request all these data from VIREC)

April 4: "Mortality Ascertainment: Death Where is Thy Record," Noreen Arnold, MS

Mortality is one of the most frequently studied outcomes in health services research and clinical trials. In this cyber seminar, Noreen Arnold will present the results of a recent VIREC study that:

- examined the completeness and reliability of death dates found in VA data sources
- determined the costs and benefits associated with use of alternative sources for death ascertainment
- developed a strategy for building a central database or registry of death data that would be used by VA researchers for death ascertainment

May 2: Assessing VA Health Care Use (title TBN), Kevin Stroupe, PhD

2. AMIA 2006 Biomedical and Health Informatics Conference: Abstracts Due March 15

The American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA) is seeking submissions for their 2006 Conference: Biomedical and Health Informatics, to be held November 11-15, 2006 in Washington DC. This conference is geared towards cutting-edge work from both theoretical/conceptual and practical/real-world perspectives. The deadline for submissions is March 15, 2006. Information can be found on the Internet at <http://www.amia.org/meetings/f06/>.

3. New Issue of DSS Newsletter Available

The February-March issue of *DSS Matters* has been released. This issue includes descriptions of (1) the difference between CMS relative value units (RVUs) and DSS RVUs, (2) the new directive on DSS labor mapping for physicians and dentists, and (3) new and enhanced DSS reports. *DSS Matters* can be accessed on the VA Intranet (address given in the Intranet version of this *Data Issues Brief*).

4. HERC Guidebook Update

The Health Economics Resource Center (HERC) “Research Guide to Decision Support System National Cost Extracts 1998 - 2004” has been updated (2/8/06). This guide describes the core National Data Extracts (NDEs) of the Decision Support System that report the cost of inpatient and outpatient encounters provided by the VA. The guide can be accessed from the HERC Internet Web site: <http://www.herc.research.med.va.gov/home/default.asp>.

5. Information about 2001 National Survey of Veterans Available on VIREC Web Site

Information about the 2001 National Survey of Veterans is now available on VIREC’s Internet Web site <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/NationalSurveyVeterans/2001NationalSurveyofVeterans.htm>. The Office of Policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness Office conducted a national survey of veterans. The purpose of the telephone survey was to collect information relevant to planning and budgeting VA programs. Information was collected on a national sample of veterans, as well as a sample of veterans selected from VA Compensation and Pension, and Health Care Enrollment files.

6. New Veteran Indicator Flag (VETIND) Added to Outpatient Medical SAS Datasets

A new field, Veteran Indicator, has been added to the Medical SAS Outpatient Datasets. The SAS variable is VETIND, the format is \$XXYN with possible values of YES, NO or space and the label is Veteran Indicator. Information is available on the VA Intranet (address given in the Intranet version of this Data Issues Brief).

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@rva.gov or call (708) 202-2413.