VIReC RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA

Data Issues Brief	October 2006

VIReC UPDATES:

1. VIReC Medicare Documentation Update Provides Info about Data Usability

VIReC now has detailed summary information about VA Medicare claims data including variable listings (SAS^{TM} Proc Contents) for 1997 through 2004 data on our Intranet Web site. We have also added descriptive summary information (Select Frequencies and Minimum/Maximum Values) for the following Medicare files: Vital Status (through 2005), Denominator and MEDPAR (through 2004): http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/VA-MedicareData/Datasets/Medicaredatafiles.htm.

VA DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS:

2. New VA Vital Status Datasets at AAC Will Improve Mortality Ascertainment Research

Two new datasets for assessing mortality are now available at the Austin Automation Center (AAC) thanks to National Data Systems (NDS) and the VHA Data Consortium efforts. The two new VA Vital Status files combine death dates from all sources currently available to VA researchers, including the Medical SAS Inpatient Datasets, the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Beneficiary Identification and Resource Locator System (BIRLS), the Medicare Vital Status file, and the Social Security Administration (SSA) death file. The methods are based on HSR&D Service-supported research (SDR 03-157) undertaken at VIReC (http://www.pophealthmetrics.com/content/pdf/1478-7954-4-2.pdf).

The two VA Vital Status datasets are the Master and Mini files. The Master file contains one record for each SSN-date of birth (DOB)-gender combination. It provides all dates of birth, genders, and dates of death found for each SSN. The Mini file contains one record for each SSN and provides the "best" dates of birth and death. Both of these files include the VA's Scrambled SSN. A crosswalk file to real SSNs is available for researchers requiring real SSNs. These files are now available at AAC. Researchers must follow the real SSN clearance process to use the new functional task code assigned to the Vital Status files: http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/VitalStatus/VitalStatus.htm.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES:

3. Database and Methods Cyber Seminar Series

Katherine Mallin, PhD and Kristin Koelling, MPH will present on November 7 "Assessing Non-VA Health Care Use Utilizing VA-Medicare Data." Dr. Mallin is a math statistician with VIReC and Ms. Koelling is Technical Services Director at VIReC. The Cyber Seminars on Databases and Methods, sponsored by VIReC, take place at 1 pm ET on the first Tuesday of each month. Interested parties should go to https://hsrdtraining.webex.com/. Participants are welcome to join the session on a "first come, first serve" basis. For further information, contact Laurel Nevinslong at laurel.nevinslong@va.gov.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES (continued):

4. Clinical Informatics Cyber Seminar Series

Pat Ebright, DNS, MNS, BSN will present on November 21 "Understanding Real Work Complexity for Design and Implementation of IT." Dr. Ebright is Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, Indiana University and a clinical nurse specialist. The Cyber Seminars on Clinical Informatics, sponsored by VIReC and the Center of Excellence on Implementing Evidence-Based Practice, take place at 12 pm ET on the third Tuesday of each month. Participants are welcome to join the session on a "first come, first serve" basis.

All previous Database and Methods, and Clinical Informatics Cyber Seminars are available as audio recordings at the Center for Information Dissemination and Education Resources (CIDER) (http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/for_researchers/cyber_seminars/).

CONFERENCES

5. American Medical Informatics Association Meeting November 11-15

The 2006 American Medical Informatics Association Meeting will take place at the Hilton Washington & Towers in Washington DC on November 11-15. The theme of the meeting is "Biomedical and Health Informatics." For information go to http://www.amia.org/meetings/f06/.