



VA Information Resource Center
Data Issues Brief
November, 2001

1. Fiscal Year 2001 NPCD/PTF Medical SAS Datasets Closed Out

The FY-2001 National Patient Care Database (NPCD) and Patient Treatment File (PTF) Medical SAS Datasets have been finalized and are now available for use. Any subsequent NPCD ambulatory patient information submitted will be appended to co-existing "revised" datasets for a period of up to two years. For more information on these data or how to access them please contact VIREC at virec@research.hines.va.gov.

2. NPCD Medical SAS Outpatient Diagnosis (SG) and Procedure (SC) Datasets to be Discontinued

The National Patient Care Database (NPCD) Medical SAS Outpatient Diagnosis (SG) and Outpatient Procedure (SC) SAS Datasets will be discontinued beginning in FY-2002. This action is being taken to reduce redundancy with the associated Medical SAS Outpatient Event (SE) dataset for a given fiscal year, since the Event dataset contains all of the information found in the Outpatient Diagnosis and Procedure datasets. The Outpatient Diagnosis and Procedure datasets created prior to FY-2002, however, will still be available for use. For more information on these datasets please contact VIREC at virec@research.hines.va.gov.

3. Changes Made to NPCD Medical SAS Outpatient Visit (SF) Datasets

Those interested in examining long-term trends in VA outpatient workload can no longer use the VA Outpatient Visit (SF) SAS datasets of the National Patient Care Database (NPCD) at the Austin Automation Center (AAC). Secondary clinic stops have been excluded from the datasets that characterize care given after October 1, 1996. Data are not comparable to earlier years, which include secondary stop codes.

All VA outpatient encounters are assigned a primary clinic stop, a 3-digit code that indicates the type of clinic where care was provided. Some encounters at some facilities are also assigned a second 3-digit code, called a secondary (or credit) stop. The only importance of the secondary stop is as a historical measure of outpatient workload. The SF files prior to fiscal year 1996 included both primary and credit stops but failed to distinguish between them. Studies that go back to this period can only count the number of "stops visited" rather than the

actual number of visits. The SF datasets include data on all VA ambulatory care since 1986, and are the only source of VA outpatient data prior to October 1, 1995.

Researchers who are interested in care provided after October 1, 1996 should use the Outpatient Event (SE) SAS datasets, which contain diagnosis and procedures codes, and separate fields that distinguish primary and credit stops. Analysts who wish to identify trends in VA utilization that are comparable to the pre-1997 SF datasets will have to count the number of primary and credit stops in the SE datasets.

VA adopted a new policy for stop codes in 1998, renaming them "DSS identifiers". Credit stops were to be used only in selective circumstances, as modifiers of the primary stop to characterize care with greater specificity. VA continues to report some 8.8 million secondary clinic stops each year, accounting for more than 10% of the total stops. Most of these secondary stops are not assigned in conformity with the 1998 policy. For more information on these datasets please contact VIREC at virec@research.hines.va.gov.

4. New Decision Support System (dSs) Reports on KLFMenu

The KLFMenu Web site on the VA Intranet now provides summary reports of national data from the VA Decision Support System (dSs). Both reports draw data from the dSs Account Level Budget Cost Center (ALBCC):

1. ALBCC Production Unit Summary: Hours & Costs; Budget, Actual, & Variance. This is a summary of hours and dollars by DSS Production Unit.
2. ALBCC VA Cost Center Summary: Hours & Costs; Budget, Actual, & Variance. This is a summary of hours and dollars by VA Cost Center.

As with other KLFMenu reports, these can be run for user-specified time periods at the facility, VISN, or national level. For further information, VA Intranet users can consult the KLFMenu web site [REDACTED].

5. 2002 Decision Support System (dSs) Users Conference Planned

The 2002 Decision Support System (dSs) Users Conference will be held in Austin, TX, the week of April 22nd. There is a call for presentations, posters and PC demonstrations. Proposed sessions or demonstrations may address any aspect of dSs practice or theory, including both technical and administrative topics. The dSs User Conference Planning Committee will assemble an agenda that addresses the needs of both the beginner and advanced dSs user. Details on the conference including registration, lodging and agenda will be posted on the conference web site ([REDACTED]) after January 1, 2002. If you are interested in participating as a presenter you may visit the conference web site now for more information.

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