VA Information Resource Center
Data Issues Brief
June 2000

1. Unique Patients Database

Researchers often need to merge VA databases to obtain a denominator (e.g., total unique users) for calculating rates per 1,000 (or 10,000 or 100,000). The VISN Service Support Center (VSSC), a field unit of the Chief Network Office, has created a SAS database that contains unique users by station by fiscal year. The file is housed at the Austin Automation Center (AAC) and is accessible to researchers who have an Austin Time Sharing Option (TSO) account. The FY-99 file name is:

RMTPRD.MED.SAS.UNIQSSN.BYSTA3N.FY99.DATA

The file taps into the following data files to create the unique patients by station: Patient Treatment File (PTF) – both Main and Extended; Outpatient Clinic File (SF), Main Census, Extended Census, Contract Nursing Home (CNH), and the FEE basis files (ANCIL, MED, INPT, PHR). The total number of observations in the FY-99 file is 4,515,071. The variables in the file include patient identifier (SCRSSN), sex, date of death, eligibility, means test, geographic identifiers (home county, VISN, ZIP), and station (STA3N).

2. Demographic Reference on Veteran Population

The Changing Veteran Population: 1990-2020 is a concise reference and data sourcebook on demographic trends within the veteran population and on selected characteristics of veterans. Included are estimates and projections of the veteran population by age, sex, period of service, and state of residence, as well as the most recent data on the social and economic characteristics of veterans and program use among them. This link is found on the VA's Home Page (www.va.gov) under the "What's New on the VA Web" link.

3. Austin Downloads

If you download data from the AAC, you can use PKZIP on the computer system in Austin to compress your files before downloading them. This will save both time and network bandwidth. Below is a sample job that will take 3 files in your workspace (TESTFILE1, TESTFILE2, and TESTFILE3) and will put them into a compressed file called OUT.ZIP (the .ZIP is important).

```
//S578LFB2 JOB  TSOUNKA9,S578XXX,
 //   NOTIFY=&SYSUID,MSGCLASS=I
 //ZIPUP EXEC PKZIP,DF=LB
 -ADD
 -ARCHIVE(SF57XXX.OUT.ZIP)
S578LFB.TESTFILE1
S578LFB.TESTFILE2
S578LFB.TESTFILE3
 //*
```

Thanks to Larry Brand, Midwest Center for Health Services and Policy Research, for making VIReC aware of this useful utility.

4.   New ZIP Code Tabulation Areas Developed

At the request of data users for statistical data by ZIP Code area, the U.S. Census Bureau has developed ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) – approximate area representations of United States Postal Service ZIP Code service areas. Although ZCTAs represent the majority ZIP Codes for addresses within each census block, ZCTAs and Zip Codes are not synonymous. While ZIP Codes represent networks for mail delivery, ZCTAs represent areas and are extended to include all land and water regions. ZCTAs exclude single delivery point ZIP Codes for firms and organizations, but they include dedicated post office box ZIP Codes where a main post offices has only post office box deliveries. Nationwide ZCTA boundaries are not expected to be available until early 2001. More information about ZCTAs and their use at the three Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal sites can be obtained at http://www.census.gov/geo/ZCTA/zcta.html.

5.   AAC Hosts the 12th Information Technology Conference (ITC)

The Information Technology Conference (ITC) will be held August 7-11, 2000, at the Convention Center in Austin, Texas. ITC 2000 is hosted by the Austin Automation Center, and sponsored by the Office of Information and Technology, Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefits Administration, in partnership with the Health Education Development System (HEDS), Inc. For more information, go to http://vaww.aac.va.gov/ITC/.

6.   New Clinical Trials Web Site

The National Library of Medicine has launched a new site called http://www.ClinicalTrials.gov. The site provides access to information about the location of clinical trials, their design and purpose, criteria for participation and, in some cases, further information about the disease and treatment under study.