



VA Information Resource Center

Data Issues Brief

October 2000

1. EOY Close-Out on October 13, 2000

The deadline for all VA facilities to transmit their end-of-year data to the Austin Automation Center (AAC) was October 13, 2000. The SAS workload files are officially “closed out” and available to end-users through the AAC. Additional information can be obtained from the Austin HelpDesk at 512-326-6780. VIREC staff will publish the differences between the FY-99 and FY-00 SAS file structure by February 2001 on their Web site at: <http://www.virec.research.med.va.gov> or <http://www.census.gov/datamap/>.

2. VA Investigator Access to the Area Resource File (ARF)

Inquiries to VIREC from VA investigators about institutional access to the Area Resource File (ARF) prompted discussion with Inge Franklin at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Colleen Goodman at Quality Resource Systems (QRS). Although individual copies of the database, which is updated annually, are available at \$500 apiece through QRS (phone: 703-352-7393), they would like “sponsorship” to make it available for use throughout the entire VA. The cost? Approximately \$50,000. Based on this information, the VIREC concluded that, economically, it is probably to the VA's advantage to purchase single copies for investigators/centers as needed. More information about ARF and how to order a copy is now available at: <http://www.arfsys.com>.

3. Clinical Guidelines by Disease Available On-Line

The Office of Quality and Performance maintains a Web site on the VA intranet that provides a centralized place for researchers to view current VHA Clinical Practice Guidelines by Disease and, in many cases, the VISN performance data associated with these guidelines. Researchers can access this information at:

[REDACTED]

4. SOTA Conference on Informed Consent Scheduled

The VA Office of Research and Development will hold a State of the Art (SOTA) Conference, "Making Informed Consent Meaningful," March 7 – 9, 2001, at the Madison Hotel in Washington, DC. The mission of the conference is to 1) synthesize and disseminate to VA investigators, managers, and clinicians what is known and where gaps in knowledge exist about various topics critical to the health and well-being of veterans; 2) promote implementation of findings to improve quality of care; 3) strengthen dialogue among investigators, clinicians, managers and policy makers; and 4) contribute to more effective management, more informed policy decisions and more relevant research. This invitation only conference will bring together approximately 100 people, including managers, policymakers, clinicians, patients and researchers from within and outside VA.

5. HSR&D Patient Confidentiality and Data Security Committee Formed

In order to keep HSR&D investigators informed about data security and requirements of patient confidentiality under current laws, a committee has been formed by Dr. John Demakis to address these issues. Dr. Jay Freedman is chairing the committee. The participants will have a face-to-face meeting in early December 2000 to coordinate the content, compilation and distribution of guidelines for investigators. For more information, contact Jay Freedman (phone: 202-408-3662, e-mail: jay.freedman@mail.va.gov).

6. Security Top Issue for VHA Office of Information

The September 2000 edition of the CIO's newsletter lists data security as one of the top 10 issues for the Office of Information. The article states, "there are a number of actions planned to strengthen VHA's Information Security Program. The Under Secretary for Health has directed VISN CEOs to: appoint a full-time VISN Information Security Officer (ISO); enforce background checks for all personnel managing critical systems (VHA Directive 6210, Automated Information Systems (AIS) Security); conduct audits to identify vulnerabilities in end-user systems and correct any problems identified; and, by November 3, 2000, submit a Network Plan to the Chief Network Officer (CNO) for achievement of the these actions by January 31, 2001." To view the full article and to read about other top issues at the OI, visit the Web site: [\[REDACTED\]](#).

Data Issues Briefs are developed by 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 on a monthly basis and are distributed through e-mail subscriptions. Earlier issues are posted and available on the VIREC Web site at <http://www.virec.research.med.va.gov>. If you wish to receive future issues direct, please send an e-mail message to the VIREC at virec@research.hines.med.va.gov or call 708-202-2413.