



## ***VA Information Resource Center***

### ***Data Issues Brief***

December 2000

#### **1. National Prosthetic Patient Database: New Resource for Researchers**

A national comprehensive database on veterans' use of prosthetic, orthotic, and sensory aids is available at the patient level for research purposes. The National Prosthetics Patient Database (NPPD) is "a roll-up of all prosthetic data recorded at each VHA facility, providing patient information by unique Social Security Number (SSN) about patient eligibility, prosthetic treatment, date of provision, cost and vendor."<sup>1</sup> To protect veteran confidentiality, a unique Patient ID Number is assigned to each SSN. Whenever data are entered under a SSN through the Prosthetic Software Package at the local facility, the program cross-references it to the ID number. Access to the SSN is limited to those individuals who have approved access to the data. The database is physically housed at the Hines CIO Field Office. Investigators who want to access these data must have a study protocol that is approved (and has gone through IRB processes), have signed Privacy Act and Data Security statements, and should expect to pay for the costs accrued by staff to extract the requested data. Frederick Downs, Jr., Chief Consultant, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Strategic Healthcare Group, (e-mail: [downs.fred@mail.va.gov](mailto:downs.fred@mail.va.gov); phone: (202) 273-8515) is the contact person for gaining access to the database. A User Manual for NPPD can be found on the VA Intranet at the following address:

<http://vista.med.va.gov/vdl/#App96> and clicking "Prosthetics" under the Clinical heading.

#### **2. HIPAA Final Privacy Rule**

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 Final Privacy Rule was put on display at the *Federal Register* on December 20, 2000 and is expected to be published on December 28, 2000. In the meantime, the preliminary version can be viewed at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/admnsimp/>.

#### **3. Special Pay Hikes for Many Government IT Workers**

Effective the first day of the first applicable pay period beginning in January, 2001, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has approved special pay raises for entry and developmental information technology (IT) workers in classifications GS - 334, -854 and -1550. The pay raises range from 7 to 33 percent for approximately 33,000 IT employees working for the government in grades GS-5 through 12. In all, 33,000 employees in IT classifications will receive the raises. The new salary range for these employees will be

from \$29,000 to \$78,000 and will be reflected in pay tables now being developed by the OPM.

#### **4. Programming Support for Use of the Austin Databases**

The Austin Automation Center (AAC) technical staff is in the process of developing a brief, online document that answers a very common problem relating to computing space when end users try to access or manipulate large datasets such as PTF (Patient Treatment File) or OPC (Outpatient Clinic System). This document is being developed in collaboration with staff from the VA Information Resource Center (VIREC), who conceived of and proposed its development through review of the VIREC Help Desk database. The document, when completed, will be placed on the AAC web site at [REDACTED] under a new category tentatively called Med Notes.

#### **5. New Standards for Metropolitan Areas to be Released**

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is conducting a full review of the standards used to define metropolitan areas. Plans call for publication of the final standards before December 31, 2000. However, Census 2000 data will not probably reflect these geographical concept changes until at least 2003. The August 22, 2000 *Federal Register* presented draft standards based upon recommendations of the interagency Metropolitan Area Standards Review Project (MASRP) Committee to OMB and reflect public comment on earlier notices published in the *Federal Register* can be found at: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/notice822.pdf>.

A number of proposed changes revolve around redefining geographic units used for reporting and statistical purposes, changes which will have an impact on researchers conducting longitudinal analyses. Additional information about the pending changes can be found on the U.S. Census Bureau Web site at: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/masrp.html>

<sup>1</sup> Downs, F. The National Prosthetic Patient Database: A National Information Resource for Prosthetic Prescriptions Written in the VA. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development* 37(3): May/June, 2000.

*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](mailto:virec@research.hines.med.va.gov) or call 708-202-2413.