

VA INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER

DATA ISSUES BRIEF

MAY 2007

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VA DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS:

1. VA Research Data Security & Privacy

Researchers should continue to check the VA Research Data Security & Privacy page of the VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) Web site for updates (<http://www.research.va.gov/resources/data-security/>). Slides from the presentation by Dr. Joseph Francis at the VA InfoSec 2007 Conference in April provide a good overview of data security issues in VA research: [ORD Presentation at 2007 InfoSec Conference](#). Researchers are again reminded of the VA Research Data Security & Privacy course that is available through the VA Learning Online (VALO) Campus or the Learning Management System (LMS). Check under the category of training information on the ORD Web site. The course was posted March 15, 2007 and must be completed no later than June 12, 2007.

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2. VHA Directive for Screening and Evaluation of Possible Traumatic Brain Injury in OEF and OIF Veterans

VHA Directive 2007-013, "Screening and Evaluation of Possible Traumatic Brain Injury in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veterans," was issued on April 13, 2007. This directive establishes policy and procedure for screening and evaluation of possible traumatic brain injury (TBI) in OEF and OIF veterans. A task force established by VHA developed a screening instrument to assist screening these veterans for TBI and a national clinical reminder, VA-TBI Screening, was built incorporating this screening instrument. More information about this directive can be found at http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1556.

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3. Chemical and Biological Agent Exposure Database – VA

The existing System of Records in the VA known as “Shipboard Hazard and Defense Integrated Database – VA,” which includes individually-identified data on individuals from the Department of Defense (DoD), is being amended and has been newly named “Chemical and Biological Agent Exposure Database – VA.” The categories of individuals targeted in the database now include a wider range of veterans at risk and records for each veteran have been expanded to include protected health information from VHA, as well as financial information. The System Manager for the this System of Records is the VA Office of Policy and Planning (OPP), formerly known as the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness. More information about the amendment to this System of Records can be found in the Federal Register at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20071800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2007/pdf/E7-7440.pdf>

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4. Real SSN Processing from Single File for Users with Real SSN Access

National Data Systems staff has developed a Real SSN program to improve performance for SAS dataset users. Researchers are no longer required to identify a unique real SSN file with each and every source file of scrambled SSNs to access real SSNs across multiple data files. Researchers are also able to filter real SSN data by VISN or station level. Users’ Telecommunication Support Office (TSO) Automated Customer Registration Service (ACRS) ID must be approved to use the Functional Task Code for the requested real SSN access tier (national; VISN; station). More information about the Real SSN program can be found on the NPCD VA Intranet Web site (address given in the Intranet version of this *Data Issues Brief*).

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VIREC UPDATES:

5. Change Notes for VHA’s MedSAS Files Posted on VIREC Web Site

VIREC has posted notes on their VA Web site of changes to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Medical SAS (MedSAS) Datasets at the Austin Automation Center (AAC). There is a note for each of the datasets. Change Notes provide a record of major changes, including record layout changes, newly created files or other significant modifications. Changes come from the NPCD Audit Trail on the NPCD Web page and the VA HSR&D listerv. These Change Notes can be accessed at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/Medical-SAS-Datasets/SASdocumentation.htm> in the far right column of the dataset documentation table.

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6. VIREC Web Site Provides Information on VHA IE Files at AAC

The VIREC Web site provides information on the Inpatient Encounter (IE) files available at the AAC with data starting in fiscal year 2005 (FY05). The outpatient encounters documented in this file are for patients seen in one of the VHA outpatient clinics while the patient has an inpatient status. The Outpatient Encounter (SE) files exclude services that are included in the IE files. Information on the VIREC Web site (<http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/Medical-SAS-Datasets/SAS.htm>) includes description, location, proc contents and change notices.

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7. FY06 Frequencies for Select Variables in VHA MedSAS Datasets Available on VIREC Web Site

VIREC has posted FY06 frequencies for select variables from the VHA MedSAS Datasets on its Web site. These may be accessed at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/References/RUG/RUG-SelectVarFreq06.pdf>.

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8. FY06 Proc Contents for VHA MedSAS Datasets Updated on VIREC Web Site

The proc contents for the VHA MedSAS Datasets have been updated on the VIREC Web site for FY06 to reflect full year record counts: <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/Medical-SAS-Datasets/SASdocumentation.htm>. The proc contents for the VHA MedSAS Datasets include information about the variables in the dataset: label names with header explanations, as well as type, length and format of the variable.

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CONFERENCES

9. NIH Conference on Dissemination and Implementation in September 2007

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) will be holding a conference entitled “Building the Science of Dissemination and Implementation in the Service of Public Health” on September 10-11, 2007 on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland. The conference builds upon NIH’s new strategic prospectus advancing the “science of implementation” as well as the existing trans-NIH Funding Opportunity Announcement which seeks to support dissemination and implementation research in health. Look for upcoming information on the OBSSR Web site in the near future: http://obssr.od.nih.gov/Content/About_OBSSR/about.htm

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