



VIReC Appoints Associate Director

Min-Woong Sohn, PhD, is the new VIReC Associate Director. Dr. Sohn joins VIReC from the University of Chicago, where his primary research focused on hospital and market competitiveness. Dr. Sohn's extensive experience includes working with hospital discharge, claims, and area resource file data. He will also serve as a Senior Staff member in the VHA Midwest Center for Health Services and Policy Research (MCHSPR).

1. SAS Version of VA Site Tracking System Created At AAC

The VA's Planning Systems Support Group (PSSG) has created a version of their VA Site Tracking System (VAST) in a SAS dataset housed at the Austin Automation Center (AAC). The VAST system provides a way to track station numbers and types of services provided at each geographically unique VHA site. The dataset went into production January 1, 2003, and will be updated every two weeks. Detailed information is on the VHA Intranet ([REDACTED]).

2. Means Test Thresholds for FY2003

VHA Directive 2002-082, dated December 13, 2002, revises the Means Test Thresholds, Medicare Deductible Rate, and Child Income Exclusions for calendar year 2003. As the directive states, "Below the Means Test Threshold" is defined as those veterans whose attributable income and net worth are such that they are unable to defray the expenses of care and therefore are not subject to copayment charges for hospital and outpatient medical services." For full details, see <http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12002082.pdf>.

3. DSS Matters Newsletter

The December 2002 / January 2003 issue of the VHA Decision Support System (DSS) newsletter includes numerous articles of special interest to researchers who may utilize DSS data. For example, summary reports on the VISN Support Services Center Website from the four new clinical DSS national data extracts are described. Also of interest is news that DSS completed the certification process for FY2002 with a successful reconciliation of the DSS Account Level Budgeter to the Financial Management System. The DSS Matters newsletter is on the VA Intranet ([REDACTED]). Instruction for using the VSSC Website for reports is available in *VIReC Insights* at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov>.

4. VA Following Plan to Consolidate Information Systems Architecture

A recent article in the December 16, 2002, issue of Government Computer News (GCN) discussed the status of the Department of Veterans Affairs new Enterprise Architecture Implementation Plan. The plan consolidates security, management, and budget information systems under the direction of the office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO). The complete article can be found on the GCN website at http://gcn.com/21_34/it_infra/20621-1.html.

5. AMIA Call for Papers

The American Medical Informatics Association is accepting submissions for its 2003 Annual Symposium, "Biomedical and Health Informatics: From Foundations to Applications." Submissions may be for papers, posters, demonstrations, panels, tutorials, and workshops. The deadline for submission is 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, March 12, 2003. Full information is at the AMIA Web site, <http://www.amia.org/>.

6. HHS Creates New Human Research Protection Advisory Committee

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson has named 11 doctors, scientists and other experts to head the new Advisory Committee on Human Research Protection. The committee is charged with providing advice to the department on matters relating to the responsible conduct of research involving human subjects. This includes research issues involving special populations such as children, neonates, prisoners and the decisionally impaired, pregnant women, embryos and fetuses, individuals and populations in international studies, populations in which there are individually identifiable samples, data or information, and investigator conflicts of interest. The formal news release on this new committee can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2003pres/20030103.html>.

Data Issues Briefs are developed by the staff of 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. Previous releases are posted and available on the VIREC Web site at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov>. If you wish to receive future issues directly or have any suggestions or comment about the *Data Issues Briefs*, please send an e-mail message to the VIREC at virec@research.hines.va.gov or call (708) 202-2413.