RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA

Data Issues Brief   November 2003

1. VA-Medicare Data for Research

New pages on the VIReC Web site announce the availability of Medicare data for use in VA research. VIReC has created SAS datasets of Medicare claims data for 1999 through 2001, and data for future years will be made available as the data are released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Full information is at http://www.virec.research.va.gov/vamedicare/datasets.htm. VIReC encourages you to share this information with interested researchers at your facility.

2. Medical SAS Datasets Closed Out For Fiscal Year 2003

The Medical SAS Inpatient and Outpatient Datasets created from the VHA's National Patient Care Database (NPCD)/Patient Treatment File (PTF) have been finalized and closed out for Fiscal Year 2003. The accompanying "revised" set of datasets, not generally recommended for research use, will continue to remain open for subsequent updates for approximately 2 years. VIReC Research User Guides to the FY2003 Medical SAS Datasets will be published in early FY2004.

VHA Directive 2003-056, "Closeout Of Veterans Health Administration Corporate Patient Data Files," specifies new closeout dates for all monthly and end of fiscal year updates for VHA corporate patient data files. The directive is available at http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12003056.pdf.

3. FY2003 Medical SAS Datasets Reflect Change in VHA Means Test Workload Capture

FY2003 Medical SAS Datasets include records for patients without a current Means Test, reflecting a policy change per VHA Directive 003-026, "Disabling The Means Test And/Or Appointment Blocking Functionality." Issued in May 2003, the Directive reversed earlier policy that blocked transmission of records to the National Patient Care Database (NPCD) for patients without a completed Means Test at the time of care. In FY2003 Medical SAS Datasets, patients without a current Means Test classification have a value of "U," with a formatted value of "Not Done," in the variable MEANS. The Directive is at http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/Direct/12003026.pdf).

4. VHA Directive Specifies Co-Payment Level by FY2004 DSS Identifier

VHA Directive 2003-057, "Implementation Of Changes For Co-Payments For Outpatient Medical Care Provided To Veterans By The Department Of Veterans Affairs, will interest researchers using VA data for cost-related studies. The directive describes a three-tier co-payment system and, in an appendix, specifies the co-payment category for each FY2004 DSS Identifier (also known as stop code). For full information, see http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12003057.pdf.

5. NPCD Web Site Upgrade Offers Report Options

The National Patient Care Database Web site on the VA Intranet is in the process of upgrading and already provides easy-to-use reports on various topics, including ambulatory care, cardiac catheterizations, and facilities. The Web is ███████████████████████████████████.

6. New Search Engine for VIReC Web Site

Researchers can now search the VIReC Web site with greater precision and choose from found documents that have higher relevance. Transition to the Verity K2 search engine is the result of the VA Web Search Improvement Project (VAWSIP), which was established to improve the search results on all VA Internet web servers. Updates to the VIReC Web site are now available the next day because the new search engine "crawls" the site every night to index any changes. The VIReC search page, with a customized combination of basic and advanced search features, is at
http://www.virec.research.va.gov/SearchSite.htm.

7. Panel Discussions at 2003 QUERI National Meeting Coordinated by VIReC

The 2003 QUERI National Meeting to be held December 10-12, 2003, will include two sessions coordinated and facilitated by VIReC:

- *Data Resources, Privacy, and Security: Things You Need To Know* will focus on data sharing policy development, data security and exemptions, storage of data, and issues surrounding transmitting and receiving data. Panelist will include Denise M. Hynes, PhD, Patricia L. Watts, JD, and Linda Kok, MA.

- *Informatics Strategies to Support Healthcare Quality Improvement* will be moderated by Denise M. Hynes, PhD, and will address intervention strategies for the target population, phases of care, IT interface, and plans for research implementation. Panelists Mary K. Goldstein, PhD, John D. Piette, PhD, Alex Young, MD, and a representative of VHA CIO will contribute expertise in informatics for clinical decision support, telemedicine, and collaborative care management.

For information about the QUERI national meeting, visit
http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/research/queri/QUERI-Call-for-Abstracts.pdf.