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### VIREC UPDATES

#### 1. Updated VHA Vital Status File Web Page

VIREC's "VHA Vital Status File (VSF)" Web page has been revised to provide up-to-date information on file contents. Beginning in December 2010, the VBA Veterans Service Network (VETSNET) Corporate Mini Master File is included as a source file in the quarterly generation of the VSF File resulting in the addition of new variables to the VSF Master.

This updated Web page can be accessed on the VIREC Web site at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/VitalStatus/VitalStatus.htm>.

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## 2. HSRData-L Listserv: Recent Topics

The HSRData-L Listserv is a forum for VA researchers and data users to exchange information, ideas, questions, and answers about VA data and informatics. For those who may have missed last month's listserv discussion, subject lines include:

- Vets vs. Non-vets in PTF data
- OEFOIF indicator in MedSAS data

To view these and other archived discussions, visit the HSRData-L Listserv VA Intranet Web site.

VIREC maintains HSRData-L, which is available to researchers and data users with a "va.gov" e-mail address. To subscribe to the listserv, visit the VIREC VA Intranet Web site.

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## DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

### 3. Updates to NCVAS Statistics Now Available

The February 2, 2011, updates to *VA Benefits & Health Care Utilization Statistics* from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS) are now available. Researchers may access these statistics via the "VA Stats and a Glance" Quick Link on the VIREC homepage (<http://www.virec.research.va.gov/>) or the NCVAS Web site (<http://www.va.gov/vetdata/>).

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### 4. Medical SAS Datasets Closeout Calendar Days Reduced

The NPCD recently reported that effective February 1, 2011, workload closeout dates for monthly and end-of-fiscal-year updates to the VHA corporate patient files are now 7 calendar days rather than 14 calendar days, as previously stipulated in *VHA Directive 2007-030, Closeout of Veterans Health Administration Corporate Patient Data Files Including Quarterly Inpatient Census* ([http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1603](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1603)).

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### 5. Health Economics Resource Center FAQ on VA and Medicare Cost Comparison

The Health Economics Resource Center (HERC) has published a new FAQ, *Comparison of VA and Medicare Costs* that describes Medicare and VA cost data, the differences between these data, and what can be done to make them more comparable.

This FAQ can be accessed on HERC's Web site at [http://www.herc.research.va.gov/resources/faq\\_b07.asp](http://www.herc.research.va.gov/resources/faq_b07.asp).

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### 6. Medicare Data Public Use File Available for Download

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has announced the release of a Public Use File (PUF) containing 2008 inpatient claims data for a 5% sample of Medicare beneficiaries with fee-for-service coverage. This file is available as a free download in CSV format. It contains non-identifiable, claim-specific information and is within the public domain. There are some demographic and claim-related variables provided in this PUF; however, all directly identifiable information has been removed. Moreover, other potentially identifying variables, which might cause identification by themselves or in combination with other variables, have either been removed from the files or had their values re-coded.

See [http://www.cms.gov/BSAPUFS/03\\_Inpatient\\_Claims.asp](http://www.cms.gov/BSAPUFS/03_Inpatient_Claims.asp) for more information about the steps taken to de-identify the data.

Complete documentation of the data and de-identification process are provided in [http://www.cms.gov/BSAPUFS/downloads/2008\\_BSA\\_Inpatient\\_Claims\\_PUF\\_GenDoc.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/BSAPUFS/downloads/2008_BSA_Inpatient_Claims_PUF_GenDoc.pdf).

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## EDUCATION

### 7. VIREC Clinical Informatics Cyberseminar Series

#### Upcoming Seminars

*Using AUDIT-C Alcohol Screening Data in VA Research: Interpretation, Strengths, Limitations, & Sources*

March 15th, 12pm Eastern

Katharine Bradley, MD, MPH

Dr. Bradley is currently the Co-Clinical Coordinator of the Substance Use Disorders (SUD) QUERI and leads the Seattle Alcohol Misuse Work Group of SUD QUERI.

*User Perceptions of Patient Portals in an Academic Medical Center*

April 19th, 12pm Eastern

Bonnie Wakefield, PhD, RN, FAAN & Douglas S. Wakefield, PhD

Bonnie Wakefield, PhD, serves as Section Editor, Technology Innovations for the Journal of Gerontological Nursing, Editorial Board member for the journal Telemedicine and e-Health, and is Clinical Coordinator for the VA e-Health QUERI.

Douglas S. Wakefield, PhD, directs the Center for Health Care Quality (CHCQ) at the University of Missouri where he is a professor of Health Management and Informatics. Dr. Wakefield has secondary appointments in the Departments of Internal Medicine and Family and Community Medicine, and in the Sinclair School of Nursing.

#### Recently Archived Presentations

*Use of Interactive Voice Response Technology in Health Care*

*Update on Telemedicine Outreach for PTSD - Lessons Learned*

Researchers may visit the VIREC Web site to register for a seminar or to access archived presentations at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/EducationResources/Seminars/Cyberseminars.htm>. E-mail questions to VIREC's Clinical Informatics Cyberseminar Coordinator, Joanne Stevens, at [Joanne.Stevens@va.gov](mailto:Joanne.Stevens@va.gov).

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### 8. VIREC Database and Methods Cyberseminar Series

#### Upcoming Seminars

*Measuring Laboratory Use and Results Using the VA DSS National Lab Data*

April 4th, 1pm Eastern

Elizabeth Tarlov, RN, PhD

Dr. Tarlov is Associate Director of the VA Information Resource Center (VIREC) and a Core Investigator at the Center for Management of Complex Chronic Care (CMC3) at the Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital.

#### Recently Archived Presentations

*Applying Comorbidity Measures Using VA and Medicare Data*

Researchers may visit the VIREC Web site to register for a seminar or to access archived presentations at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/EducationResources/Seminars/Cyberseminars.htm>. E-mail questions to VIREC's Database and Methods Cyberseminar Coordinator, Melissa Brown, at [Melissa.Brown3@va.gov](mailto:Melissa.Brown3@va.gov).

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## OPEN CALLS

### **9. AMIA 2011 Annual Symposium: Call for Proposals Open Until March 17th**

The American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA) will hold its Annual Symposium this year in Washington D.C. from October 22 – 26, 2011. The call for proposals is open until March 17, 2011.

For details regarding proposal submission, visit the AMIA Web site at <https://www.amia.org/amia2011/proposals>.  
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### **10. Medicare & Medicaid Research Review (MMRR) General Call for Papers**

*Medicare & Medicaid Research Review (MMRR)* is accepting ongoing submissions for manuscripts. Papers addressing changes in coverage, quality, access, the organization and delivery of health services, payment for health services, and innovative methods are of particular interest.

For more information contact the Editor-in-Chief, David Bott, PhD at [MMRR-Editors@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:MMRR-Editors@cms.hhs.gov).  
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## VIREC TIP OF THE MONTH

### **11. Functional Task Codes for Data Access**

Researchers requesting authorization to access VA data on the Austin Information Technology Center's (AITC) mainframe are required to complete VA Form 9957 and indicate the dataset requested by providing the Functional Task Code (FTC) for that particular dataset. A FTC is a number coordinated through National Data Systems (NDS), which identifies data files needed for a project. In the Functional Task Code Grid, NDS categorizes FTCs by authorized access level and specifies:

- Level of Account Access (National, VISN, Station Level – Real or Scrambled SSNs)
- Responsibility – person(s) responsible for providing/approving access
- Functional Task Code(s) – 7 digit (alpha/numeric) code
- Details – Provides additional information regarding the dataset or access requirements

The Functional Task Code Grid is available on the NDS VA Intranet Web site.

For instructions on requesting access to data, visit VIREC's "Toolkit for New Users of VA Data – Requesting Access to Data" Web page at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/Support/Training-NewUsersToolkit/DataAccess.htm>.

Data access forms including VA Form 9957 can be accessed on the NDS VA Intranet Web site.  
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**Data Issues Brief:** a monthly newsletter published 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.

**Intended Audience:** VA researchers and staff

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**Intranet Versions:** Call the VIREC Help Desk at 708–202–2413.

**Contact Information:** For comments, suggestions, or newsworthy topics that have not been addressed, call 708–202–2413 or send a message to [virec@va.gov](mailto:virec@va.gov).

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