



Intranet addresses have been removed from this document. Intranet links are available on the Intranet version of this publication. For more information, please go to VIREC's Redaction Information web page:

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RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA

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Data Issues Brief

November 2005

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### **1. New Dataset Identifies OEF/OIF Veterans**

A new SAS dataset housed at the Austin Automation Center allows identification of veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF/OIF) and are enrolled with and/or users of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) health care system. The VHA Health Eligibility Center receives a listing from the Department of Defense (DoD) of discharged veterans who served in OEF/OIF. If a veteran on the DoD listing is either enrolled at the Health Eligibility Center or has utilized VHA services, the veteran is included in the new SAS dataset. The dataset is cumulative and updated as new information is received, i.e., multiple times per month. The dataset name and proc contents are available on the VA Intranet at [REDACTED] under the heading "Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF)".

### **2. BIRLS Death File Changed**

National Data Systems (NDS) has announced that the sort order of the BIRLS Death File changed effective October 17, 2005. The new order is by scrambled Social Security Number. For further information, see the NDS Audit Trail of Changes on the Intranet at [REDACTED].

### **3. Database Provides Historical Crosswalk of Station Numbers**

The Planning Systems Support Group (PSSG) has created a database that associates each station identifier found in eight years of VHA Medical SAS inpatient (PM and XM) and outpatient (SF) datasets with a unique identifier in the VA Site Tracking (VAST) system. The database is a mechanism to allow all Medical SAS data users to "consistently aggregate data to current sites." Information about both VAST and the new crosswalk of station numbers is on the Intranet at [REDACTED].

### **4. New Dataset Identifies Counties Within VISNs**

The Planning Systems Support Group has made available a new SAS® dataset, as well as a database, that shows the current assignment of counties to each VHA Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN). Information about the PSSG dataset, as well as full documentation of the dataset fields is on the Intranet at [REDACTED].

### **5. Updated VHA Coding Handbook Available**

The Health Information Management Systems office has issued the *VHA Coding Handbook Version 5.0.1*, dated June 23, 2005. This comprehensive handbook provides coding guidelines for inpatient and outpatient care, for special screening programs (e.g., AIDS/HIV, Persian Gulf War Syndrome), and many other aspects of VA health care. The handbook is available on the Intranet at [REDACTED] and on the VIREC Web site at <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/References/VHACodingHandbook/2005CodingHandbookv5-0-1.pdf>.

## 6. Standardized VistA Files Closed To Local Changes

VHA Directive 2005-044, "Modification of VHA Nationally-Standardized Files," was issued October 3, 2005. It states that nationally standardized VistA files can be altered only by the Office of Information (OI) or with approval from OI. The directive, with links to listings of the files considered standardized, is on the Internet at [http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1324](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1324).

## 7. FY2006 Technical Manual for the VHA Performance Measurement System

The Office of Quality and Performance (OQP) has issued the *FY2006 Technical Manual for the VHA Performance Measurement System*, which gives detailed information on methodologies used in VHA performance measurement. This includes definitions, data collection methods, schedules, cohort descriptions, and contacts for question and additional information. The manual is posted on the Intranet at [REDACTED].

## 8. VeHU Courses Available as Internet-Based Training

Sessions from the VHA eHealth University (VeHU) annual training conference on the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) and related clinical software (VistA) are now available on the Internet. All sessions from 2003 and 2004 have been prepared as online training. The web based training for 2005 is currently being developed, but the power point files and the Q&A from sessions (where appropriate) are posted now. Live meeting recordings were done on 18 sessions in 2005 and links to those recordings are available on this website as well. See the VeHU site at <http://www.vehu.med.va.gov>.

## 9. VIREC Plans Primary Web Site on VHA Intranet

VIREC currently maintains almost identical Internet and Intranet Web sites (at [www.virec.research.va.gov](http://www.virec.research.va.gov) and [REDACTED], respectively) The Center is planning to make its primary Web presence on the VHA Intranet and to maintain a limited presence on the Internet. The change will make it easier to comply with Office of Communications requirements for Internet Web sites, and it will be possible for VIREC to provide researchers with information and hyperlinks to VA information sources that cannot be put on an Internet site. VA-affiliated researchers will be able to utilize the Intranet site from any computer within the VA firewall or by using the VA Virtual Private Network (VPN). The VIREC Help Desk will continue to be accessible through both the Internet and Intranet Web sites. VIREC expects that the change will be completed by the end of the calendar year. Researchers with questions and comments about this development are encouraged to contact VIREC at 708-202-2413 or [VIREC@va.gov](mailto:VIREC@va.gov).

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