

VA DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS:

1. Protecting VA Research Information

The VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) is dedicated to upholding the standards of cyber security and privacy as established by VA. It is also the responsibility of all VA researchers and staff to be familiar with and to comply with existing policies, procedures and directives regarding the protection of human subjects in research and the use and disclosure of individually-identifiable information. Links to Memos from the Chief R&D Officer and VA Cyber Security and Privacy Policies are provided on the ORD Web site (<http://www1.va.gov/resdev/resources/policies/cybersecurity.cfm>). Principal Investigators (PIs) should note in particular the new memo “Certification by Principal Investigators: Security Requirements for VA Research Information.” This memo outlines a new annual process requiring PIs to submit a data security checklist and certify storage and security of VA research information for each and every one of their research projects. Links for cyber security and privacy policies cover issues such as safeguarding protected data at alternative work locations, activities with non-VA employees, etc.

2. VA Vital Status Files Now Available

Health Services Research & Development funded a VIREC-initiated investigation that used various data sources for ascertaining veterans' vital status ([SDR 03-157](#)). This investigation resulted in an algorithm used by NDS to create “mini” and “master” files that provide the best ascertainment of information on death and presumed living status. The Mini Vital Status File provides researchers with the “best” result of the ascertainment algorithm, and the Master Vital Status File provides researchers with the complete computation of “best” ascertainment. A real SSN crosswalk is also available. Access to these files is highly protected. Researchers need to follow the ACRS process to gain permission to use the function task code dedicated to each file and sign a Rules of Behavior. Real SSN access requires additional approval by the VHA Privacy Office. VIREC provides more detailed information about the Vital Status files on the VIREC website or by contacting the VIREC Helpdesk (VIREC@va.gov).

3. AAC Introduces Yearly Versioning in SAS Catalog

As of 2/5/07, the SAS datasets included in the Austin Automation Center's (AAC) Library Mainfile Catalog will include fiscal year (FY) dates. The current files will be FY07, followed by FY08, etc. Files without an FY indication will contain data prior to FY07. The catalog will include CPTNAM07 (with prior year data CPTNAMES), DRGNAM07, DX9NAM07 and SG9NAM07. Since code values are reused with different descriptions by both the American Medical Association (CPT) and Health & Human Services (ICD-9), yearly versions are required to ensure that when data analysts match a description to a code, the description corresponds with what was coded at the time of the clinical encounter.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES:

4. March 2007 Clinical Informatics Cyber Seminar

The Cyber Seminars on Clinical Informatics, sponsored by VIREC, take place at 12 pm ET on the third Tuesday of each month. The March seminar on Tuesday, March 20 will be presented by Rob Silverman, PharmD. The title of his presentation is “VistA Clinical Reminders and Patient Lists.” Participants are welcome to join the session on a “first come, first serve” basis. Information on the series can be found at: http://www.hsrp.research.va.gov/for_researchers/cyber_seminars/catalog.cfm. For further information contact Laurel Nevinslong at laurel.nevinslong@va.gov.

CALL FOR PAPERS

5. *American Journal of Public Health* Calls for Manuscripts on Health Care for Veterans

The *American Journal of Public Health (AJPH)* intends to publish a collection of manuscripts on Health Care for Veterans. They are interested in soliciting data-driven research, meta-analyses, and review or commentary manuscripts concerning health care for veterans. Emphasis will be directed at manuscripts that examine the subject in the context of the national effort to reform health care and to improve its quality and equity. To be considered for inclusion in this theme issue, manuscripts must be submitted by April 1, 2007. For more information go to the AJPH Web site: <http://www.ajph.org/>.

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO DISSEMINATE TO COLLEAGUES! *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 monthly. All issues are available on the VIREC Web site at <http://vaww.virec.research.va.gov/>. If you wish to receive email notification of future issues or have any suggestions or comment about the *Data Issues Briefs*, please send an e-mail message to the VIREC at virec@va.gov or call (708) 202-2413.