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HERC Enhances Fee Basis Resources

The Fee Basis program enables VA medical centers to purchase care from other providers. It has grown rapidly in recent years and now accounts for more than 10% of the VHA budget. HERC has recently enhanced its resources for VA researchers. These offerings include an updated guidebook, a new technical report, and a convenient summary of Fee Basis data in SAS format. This article explains these new resources in brief.

Guidebook

HERC staff have updated the guidebook *Fee Basis Data: A Guide for Researchers*. This document describes the contents of the eight Fee Basis datasets produced each year. It explains how Fee Basis data relate to other VA data sources and provides guidance on their use in research. The updated version contains new information on the purpose of visit, VA payment type and the HCFA payment type assigned to individual records. It also features a list of the adjustment code values. These text fields identify the reason why a claim record was updated after an initial entry. To obtain the guidebook, visit the HERC web site and click on Publications.

Technical Report

HERC has also released a new technical report #26, *Use and Cost of Fee Basis Services in FY2007*. Data from 2007-2009 were analyzed to characterize the claims for services provided in FY2007. Since the lag in submitting and approving claims can be substantial, the three year study window allowed services to be more completely characterized. The report presents the frequency and average cost associated with the most common outpatient procedure codes, all purpose of visit codes, and all HCFA payment type codes. It also tallies inpatient and ancillary claims by setting. Finally, it compares the length of stay recorded in Fee Basis records with Fee Basis stays reported secondarily in the FY2007 Patient Treatment File (PTF). The new report updates information from FY2004 services published in HERC Technical Report #18. Together they document the tremendous growth in Fee Basis care over time and reveal a slow evolution in the mix of services purchased. The two technical reports are available on the HERC intranet site alone.

Patient-Level Summary Dataset

HERC has added to its person-level cost file a field with the total cost of Fee Basis care received by each VHA patient. The annual files between FY2000 to FY2008 have now been updated with this information.

HERC Description of DSS National Data Extracts

DSS creates 20 national data extracts (NDEs). In a new FAQ, HERC briefly describes each extract and which ones may be of particular interest to researchers. The FAQ can be found at http://www.herc.research.va.gov/resources/faq_g12.asp

HERC to Attend the 28th HSR&D National Meeting

Come visit HERC staff at the 28th National Meeting of VA's Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D), being held on February 16-18, 2011, in Washington, D.C. You will find them at the HERC exhibit booth during poster sessions and breaks.

Todd Wagner and Paul Barnett will be hosting a breakfast session at 7am on the morning of Friday, February 18, in Baltimore Room 1. Meet other economic researchers, discuss your research, learn news about VA data, and ask about new products and services available from HERC. Wagner and Jean Yoon will be among the five economists making an oral presentation in the "Cost of Care" session scheduled for 2:30 pm on Thursday, February 17, in the Annapolis Room number 1.

Staff News

HERC economist Mark Smith has taken a new position with the consulting firm Thomson Reuters. Initial projects will include studies of inpatient care at U.S. hospitals and implementation of health care quality measurement in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Smith will remain a part-time VA employee while he completes a variety of economics and health services projects.

Upcoming HERC Cyber-seminars and Econometrics Course

Cyber-seminars

February 23, 2011 – Paul Barnett, Ph.D.
Overview of Health Care Efficiency Research

March 16, 2011 – Peter Almenoff, M.D.
TBA

April 20, 2011 – James F. Burgess, Jr., Ph.D.
TBA

"Econometrics with Observational Data" Course

This course provides participants with sufficient background in econometrics to choose techniques suited both to their data and to their economic model. There will be a strong emphasis on applied work, illustrating the use of statistical software applied to VA data.

February 9, 2011 – Todd Wagner, Ph.D.
Propensity Scores

March 2, 2011 – Patsi Sinnott, P.T., Ph.D., M.P.H.
Instrumental Variables Model

The schedule of upcoming cyber-seminars and courses, and information on the archives, are available on our website:
<http://www.herc.research.va.gov>.

To register for these seminars and courses, visit
http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov/for_researchers/cyber_seminars/catalog.cfm

Correction on DSS Costing of Telephone and Telehealth Care

This to correct the article on VA telehealth costs that appeared in the HERC Bulletin (volume 10 issue 3). The Decision Support System supports costing of telephone care that meets the definition of an encounter established by the VA Health Information Management Service (HIMS). Calls meet this definition if they include a patient history and clinical decision making, and if they are recorded with an appropriate outpatient identifier (stop code) from the approved list for telephone care. The article referred to the importance of telephone care to VA "primary care medical homes." The VA initiative for Patient Centered Medical Homes (PCMH) was renamed Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) in August of 2010. DSS continues to support costing of Telehealth encounters. No change was made to DSS support for Telehealth costing.