Reviewer’s report

Title: Transition to the New Data Collection Standards in the Department of Veterans Affairs

Version: Date: 9 May 2006

Reviewer: Roslyn A. Stone

Reviewer’s report:

General

This paper addresses an important problem for researchers using the race and ethnicity data in the VA databases, the comparability of self-repost data collected post-2003 and observational data collected pre-2003. This demonstration that both data sources appear to be comparable for whites and blacks but not for other minority groups is very helpful to researchers in this area. However, only 39% of veterans had self-report data in 2004, and only 52% of veterans with a single self-report value in 2004 could be linked to data from 1997-2002. In particular, the 25% of self-reported Hispanics with no race data were excluded from the comparison over time. The implications of this acknowledged limitation deserve more attention.

The second identified objective, how multi-racial data can best be "bridged" to a single value, is addressed descriptively with no real answer provided other than that results differ depending on how you do it.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Reference 28 is redundant (also listed as reference 26). How multiple discrepant records were handled should be clarified.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Further discussion of the potential implications of the large amount of missing or unlinkable data over time is warrented.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.