Cyberseminar Transcript

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Series: Using Data and Information Systems in Partnered Research

Session: Survey Data Collection Using VA REDCap

Presenter: Bonnie Paris, PhD

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Melissa: Hello everyone, and welcome to Using Data and Information Systems in Partnered Research, a Cyberseminar series hosted by VIReC, the VA Information Resource Center. We also thank CIDER for providing technical and promotional support. The series focuses on VA data used in both quality improvement and operations research partnerships. This includes QUERI projects and partnered evaluation initiative.

This slide shows the series schedule. Sessions are typically held on the third Tuesday of every month at 12 p.m. Eastern and you can find more information about this series and other VIReC Cyberseminars on VIReC’s website. And you can catch up on previous sessions on HSR&D’s VIReC Cyberseminar archive. A quick reminder for everyone who registered for today’s session, slides are available to download. This is a screenshot of a sample email you should have received today before the session. In it you will find the link to download the slides.

Today’s presentation is on VA Research Electronic Data Capture, the VA REDCap. And this session is titled Survey Data Collection Using VA REDCap, and it’ll be presented by Dr. Bonnie Paris from VIReC. Dr. Paris is a data knowledge analyst at VIReC where she manages VA Research Electronic Data Capture, REDCap, and develops data knowledge products. Prior to joining VIReC, she worked as a deputy associate director for the Clinical Partnerships for a Healthcare Transformation, CPHT group, within the VA Center for Applied Systems Engineering, VA CASE. Today she will share different approaches to survey data collection suing VA REDCap. Thank you for joining us today. I turn it over now to Bonnie.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Thank you. Good morning or good afternoon, depending on your time zone. Thank you for joining us today to learn about survey data collection using VA REDCap. And thank you, Melissa, for that nice introduction. We’re going to start off with a poll question so that we can learn more about you. Let me check real quick, is my screen updating? Are you able to see the poll questions? Okay, great.

So the first poll question is are you interested in VA data primarily due to your role as A, principal investigator or co-PI; B, research staff such as project coordinator, data manger, or programmer; C, clinical staff; D, operations staff; or E, other. And if you select other, please give us a brief description using the Q & A function in the chat window.

[Pause 3:00 – 3:11]

CIDER staff: Okay, responses it looks like have come in, so I’m going to close this out. And what we’re seeing is 17% of the audience saying principal investigator or co-PI, 67% saying research staff, 2% clinical staff, 11% operations, and 3% other.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Okay, thank you so much.

CIDER staff: And under other we have a doctoral student interested in using VA data, and other research assistant. Thank you everyone.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Thank you so much. And we have a variety of people who are using VA REDCap, so it’s good that we have a variety of people attending today. The objectives of today’s session are to provide you with a brief introduction to VA REDCap, provide examples of different survey data collection methods using VA REDCap, and also to provide you with additional information on getting started with VA REDCap.

So first, looking at what is REDCap. Basically it’s a software application. REDCap stands for Research Electronic Data Capture. And the software was developed by Vanderbilt University with a Clinical Translational Science Award from the National Institutes of Health. And the REDCap software is now used world-wide, but there are some differences in how each organization configures and uses their REDCap system. So in addition to having different versions of the software, different organizations can also [unintelligible 5:01] their software or they have different control setup as to what different users can do.

CIDER staff: Hold on, Bonnie, we’re not\_

Dr. Bonnie Paris: The next poll question\_

CIDER staff: Bonnie, we’re not seeing, we haven’t been seeing your slides here.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: All right, let’s see. Are you able to see my slides now?

CIDER staff: I’m seeing your presenter view screen.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Oh, okay. Let’s see if I can fix that. Thank you for letting me know. Apologies to everyone. If I go back\_

[Pause 5:42 – 6:08]

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Okay, is that better?

CIDER staff: Looks great.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Okay. Apologies, everyone. So we’re at the poll question number two. VA REDCap is the centralized instance of REDCap at the VA. So we’d like to know how would you rate your knowledge of VA REDCap? A, expert with extensive REDCap experience; B, intermediate with moderate VA REDCap experience; C, beginner with little or no VA REDCap experience.

CIDER staff: And responses are coming in. Again, we’ll give everyone a few more moments to respond before we close it out and go through the results.

[Pause 6:52 – 6:57]

CIDER staff: Okay, it looks like we have come to a stop there. And what we’re seeing is zero people saying experts, 19% intermediate, and 81% beginner. Thank you everyone.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Okay, great. So that is also good because I think if you were all experts, you may not find this particular presentation as useful today. So it’s more of an introductory presentation.

So now looking at the benefits of using VA REDCap. It’s available for free to all VA employees including people that have without compensation, or WOC, appointment. It is centrally managed by VIReC. We have multiple ways to reach our VA REDCap help desk, including the contact links and buttons within the VA REDCap application itself to contact a system administrator, which will start an email message to us. And I’ll discuss some of our educational and support offerings later on when we talk about getting started with VA REDCap. And the VA REDCap application itself is hosted by VINCI servers that are at the Austin Information Technology Center. And VA REDCap provides researchers with a flexible primary data collection tool.

However, there are some major limitations to VA REDCap. So VA REDCap is an intranet only application. So to respond to a VA REDCap survey, you must be logged into an active VA network account in order to even respond to a survey link. VA REDCap is also not approved for storage of Personally Identifiable Information, PII, or Protected Health Information, or PHI. We are currently working on that approval but until then it is not approved. So those are two main limitations of the system.

So today I will talking about different ways that you can collect survey data, whether by paper or verbal response or electronic response using VA REDCap. So there are a lot of instances where VA REDCap is helpful, but the limitation of not being able to have PII or PHI in the system means that if you have a study that requires any sensitive information, you need to work with your local Privacy Officer and Information Security Officer on a solution on where to store that data for your project.

And you could still use VA REDCap but use the nonidentifiable study ID in REDCap with the nonidentifiable information.

Examples of different ways that you might conduct survey data collection in VA REDCap include paper, whether it’s a mailed out a survey or an in-person survey on paper. Verbal, which could also be in-person but most often is conducted over the phone. Or electronic on a VA device that is connected to the VA intranet. And I’ll talk separately about how you might do that with Veterans responding versus VA employees responding to an electronic survey. And when I go through the different examples of how you could conduct survey data collection in VA REDCap, I will use the same example survey so that you can the similarities and differences between the various approaches.

One of the things that we offer at the VIReC VA REDCap Support Desk are different educational offerings via REDCap and how to use it. So we offer periodic live feature presentations on different aspects of using VA REDCap. We’re constantly striving to improve our educational offerings. So we have a brief survey at the conclusion of each session to get feedback from attendees.

And it’s very similar to the survey that is used by the Cyberseminar series but we have streamlined it a bit.

We ask five key questions in our survey. Some of the questions are open-ended and some have specific response options. The first step when you’re using VA REDCap for survey data collection, regardless of the data collection approach, is to build the questionnaire as an instrument in VA REDCap.

And this screen shows an example of a data dictionary code book for this five-question survey that we have. We have other resources that can guide you through this process of building an instrument, so I’m not going to get into the mechanics of how you would build an instrument right now. But we’ll talk more about once an instrument is built how you can use that instrument to collect data.

So the different elements of the instrument, or the project structure, are shown here. So in VA REDCap, there’s a variable or field name that is lowercase no spaces. You can use underscores, but the field label is what shows up to the person using the form or the survey. And that last column shows what kind of field it is and if it’s something that has restricted response options such as the how would you rate the quality of the presentation as a radio button. And the options are excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. And then there are numbers associated with each of those responses.

Just a quick note on VA REDCap terminology. Once you have developed an instrument, you can enter data using what’s called a data collection form or a survey or you can use a combination of both methods. To use the data collection form, you must be logged into VA REDCap with permission to enter data into the form. In VA REDCap you can control permission to your project and to individual data collection forms as well as some permissions to those forms. So you could have certain people set up where they can only view data. You can have other people who are able to view and enter data. Or you can have some people who can see some of your data collection instruments and not others. If you’re using a survey, then anyone connected to the VA intranet with the survey link can enter data.

And you may set it up to be anonymous or not, if in your survey you’re asking someone for their email address, for example. If it’s an employee survey and you provide a common link where the same survey link is used by everybody but then you’re asking for someone’s contact email address. Then that is identifiable. So you can use a combination of the data collection form where you have someone who’s a member of your study team usually that has the permission to go in and enter data into the form. Or you can have people respond electronically.

However, one thing to keep in mind, so in VA REDCap each instrument can be individually enabled as a survey. So that gives you that capability of having a survey link so that somebody without a VA REDCap login and permission to your project could respond to your survey. So even if you enable an instrument as a survey, you can still go in and enter data on the data collection form. And as we go through, I’ll show you examples of what the data collection form looks like for this five-question survey that we’re using as an example as well as what the electronic survey form looks like as well as what the paper survey form would look like as well.

So we will discuss three main approaches to collecting survey data from respondents. For surveys administered on paper or verbally, a VA staff member would be entering the data using a data collection form. For electronic surveys administered on a VA device, there are different considerations whether the respondent is a Veteran or a VA employee. So I will talk about those separately.

First I will talk about how VA REDCap could be used if the questionnaire were administered on paper. So this might happen with our feature presentation survey if we held an in-person feature presentation training session with a research group that’s located on the same campus that we are. And in that case, having a survey that’s distributed to the people in the room, on paper would make sense.

So with VA REDCap, it’s really easy to produce the paper questionnaire. VA REDCap automatically makes a PDF that you can print and distribute. So this slide shows how VA REDCap automatically formatted the questionnaire based on the instrument. So if you want to have finer control over that formatting, you can either use a PDF editor or you can copy the content of the PDF to Word or another program to modify the appearance of the questions.

For a survey that’s administered on paper, you would be collecting up the completed surveys and then a VA staff member or staff members would be entering the data into the data collection form. So on this screen, it shows the view of what that would look like if you were going in to enter data for this particular survey form. And if you’re using this approach of collecting on paper and then entering the data, there is an optional feature in VA REDCap for double data entry where you can have the data entered twice by two different people or possibly by the same person at two different times and then have the computer compare the data that was entered and identify any typographical errors or other discrepancies. So when it’s doing that comparison, it would pick up on the pretext fields if you had a double-space after a period versus a single space. But it’s one approach to look at the quality of the data entry to identify any typos.

So you may also administer a survey over the phone or in person. Although in this example, it’s unlikely that we would use this approach for the feature presentation survey. It could happen. Perhaps we have an attendee at a sister federal agency such as Department of Defense that’s interested in learning more about VA REDCap and how we use REDCap at the VA. And that person wants to provide feedback. So in that case, we could have one of our team members administer the survey verbally.

And in order to administer a survey verbally, a VA staff member would follow a script. For example, asking how would you rate the quality of the presentation? Excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. Then the respondent would answer the question, perhaps saying it was very good, and the VA staff member would acknowledge the response and enter it into VA REDCap. And as the VA staff member is administering the survey, they could use readback to verify that what they entered for each response is accurate. For example, if a respondent answers it was very good, then the VA staff member could say very good, thank you for that response, and then move on to the next question.

So when you’re administering a survey verbally, whether it’s in person or over the phone, a lot of times you would also put some instruction to the person conducting the survey in the data collection form as well. So this data entry form would be viewed by the staff member, and the person that’s responding to the survey may be in the same room with the staff member who is completing it or they may be on the phone located somewhere else. But they would not be seeing the instruction that is being given to the staff member entering the data.

And finally, we’ll talk about surveys that are administered electronically. For a survey to be administered electronically using VA REDCap on a VA device connected to the VA intranet, you need to meet different criteria that will apply depending on whether it’s a Veteran that’s going to use the device or a VA employee that’s going to use the device. So either way, the device has to have active VA intranet access to respond to a VA REDCap survey.

So first we’ll talk about electronic surveys of Veterans. So for a Veteran to electronically complete a VA REDCap survey, first the local ISO must approve and configure a VA device for use by the Veterans. The device must be connected to the VA intranet in order for the VA REDCap survey to be accessed. And there are local variations. So there are some sites that have successfully done this, but it’s really dependent on the local ISO.

And although we do not use this method for our feature presentation survey, this approach has been used by others at the VA, and it’s probably one of the most frequently asked questions that we get is how can I get a Veteran to be able to complete a survey electronically?

So one of the feature presentations that we had last year, it was actually March 2017, Mark Pabst presented on how they’re administering Veteran surveys using VA REDCap on iPad minis. And we have a feature presentation archive. The link is there on the screen. If you download the slides, you should be able to just click on the link, but the full link is there as well if you’re going off of a printed copy. So that’s an example of how they’re using iPad minis to electronically collect data from Veterans using VA REDCap.

This screen just shows an example of how, for the example survey that we’re talking about today, the VA REDCap feature presentation questionnaire. The REDCap survey will display a little bit differently depending on the device that’s being used. So if you’re using a tablet, they’re a little bit smaller. The survey will automatically reformat itself to fit the screen versus if you’re using a desktop with the larger monitor. But if you are using electronic surveys with Veterans or anybody who is not a VA staff member that has their own PIV card and login, you must have local ISO configure and approve the use of the device before you collect data on it. So it’s not allowed if you have a staff member log in and open up the web browser window to have somebody who’s not that person use that computer.

So now I’ll talk about the electronic surveys with VA employees. And if you’re conducting a survey of VA employees, it may require approval by the VHA National Leadership Council’s Organizational Assessment Sub-Committee. And this applies to electronic surveys and paper surveys whether it’s for quality improvement, operations, or research. So if at least one of the following are true; if the survey is of 1,000 or more VA employees or if the survey includes VA employees across 10 or more sites. So say that you’re surveying different people within the same area of, and you just want to know what kind of things are included in somebody’s program and there are 120 different programs across the VA, that would very likely meet the criteria of surveying VA employees across 10 or more sites, even though you may only have 120 respondents. And so this is regardless of whether you’re using VA REDCap or any other method including a paper survey that you created in Word and are mailing out. It’s because they have to notify the unions and make sure that the timing of the surveys don’t conflict with when we have the all-employee survey and things like that.

But if you are surveying VA employees, whether it’s on paper or electronic, you can go to the OASC site to learn more about the requirements and how to have them evaluate your proposal for conducting a VA employee survey.

When you’re distributing a survey electronically to employees, you have a few choices to make. You need to determine whether you want responses to be identifiable or anonymous. For our feature presentation survey, responses are anonymous. VA REDCap survey links can be provided to VA employees in a variety of ways. You can use VA REDCap to email invitations. If you do that, then each person that you’re inviting will get a unique survey link. You can also, at the time you send out that invitation, set up automatic reminder emails. So if somebody doesn’t respond within two weeks, you can say, okay, we'll automatically send them a reminder. And there is enough room out there that you can use, which uses what’s called a public survey URL, although it’s not really public because VA REDCap is an intranet application. So it has to be within our firewall.

You can use that link to email invitations from Microsoft Outlook or you can post the public survey URL to a VA intranet site for people to respond to. So that’s something that we do actually at the help desk. We have an online ticketing system that is actually a VA REDCap survey. And when you’re conducting an electronic survey, most VA employees would be interacting with that use thing, a monitor on a work station. So the electronic survey will display the same regardless of whether the respondent is a VA employee or a Veteran.

However there are additional features in VA REDCap that may be useful to you, depending on the needs of your project. For example, there’s something that’s called a survey queue that’s helpful when you have longitudinal data collection and you have people that are coming back to the same place every time. So there are a number of VA REDCap projects where they’re looking at a program and different elements of the program where they’re looking at an implementation and they want some periodic reports and updates. So in those cases, having the survey queue where the respondent just has one link to keep track of and then when they follow the link it has the surveys that are applicable to them at that point in time.

So we have a lot of information to help get people started with VA REDCap. So one way is start out by requesting an account. So there’s a link on the screen now to our VA REDCap intake form and that link there is a public URL. So that same link could be used by a hundred different people and it would still allow you to complete a response versus if it was something that we emailed to you directly, that unique link could only be used once. I also gave a presentation earlier this year in this same Cyberseminar series on VA REDCap 101: An Overview for VA Researchers. And so in that presentation I went into a little bit more detail on just some of the history of VA REDCap and provided some different examples of how VA REDCap is being used. So those are two things that you can do to get started.

There are also a number of resources for beginners. So there are video tutorials from Vanderbilt University and the link is provided there. That’s a Vanderbilt University website that’s external to the VA and available to anyone. And those video tutorials are also available within VA REDCap itself. There’s a tab for training videos and there are a number of quick videos that go from just several minutes to, I think the longest one might be 20 minutes. But they give a nice description of what the video covers. However, some of the functionality that they describe, such as the REDCap mobile app, is not available for use at the VA.

So we also have our feature presentation archive where we have presentations that are specific to VA REDCap and we don’t, we might point out some functionality that you might be used to in a different REDCap instance that are not available in VA REDCap. But we really only cover things that are available to you within VA REDCap. So if you follow that link, that goes to our feature presentation archive. And we have two presentations that are targeted for beginners. So underneath the everyone group, so we have a lot of presentations that are more general interest. Underneath that everyone group is where you would find the presentation slide deck on using VA REDCap with iPad minis to collect Veteran responses electronically.

We also offer VA REDCap hour. It’s a weekly question and answer session with the VA REDCap support team. We meet every Thursday at 3:00 Eastern time, and we stay on the line until we don’t have any more questions. I like to think of it as car talk, if any of you are fans of the old NPR show where people would call in with car problems. We have people calling in with their VA REDCap problems or data collection issues. So we can give you advice, not just on the mechanics of using the REDCap application, but we can also give you some advice on different options depending on your study protocol and data collection needs on what features might work best for you or what approach might be most helpful.

So the information is also here on the slide for attending the session, but we also have links on the login page to VA REDCap and on the VIReC webpage. We have a number of ways to contact us. Two of the primary ones are submitting a help desk ticket and you can also contact the VA REDCap support help desk by email. There are buttons throughout VA REDCap itself that will pop open an email to this address so you don’t even have to type it in. But you can also contact us by phone, so the number is listed there as well.

So that is it for different ways of collecting data using VA REDCap. Thank you everybody for joining us. The next session is May 22ndat noon Eastern time in the Using Data and Information Systems in Partnered Research Series on Implementing Web-based Interventions at VA. Case Studies and Diabetes Prevention and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Women Veterans by Julian Brunner and Dr. Alison Hamilton. So now we will open it up for questions. Thank you.

Melissa: Hi Bonnie. Thank you so much. There are quite a few questions that came in, so I’ll just start from the top here.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Okay.

Melissa: Are there ways to use REDCap for IVR-based surveys, e.g., automated phone system? Or would there have to be a separate data collection process that then a staff member would plug data into REDCap after the fact?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: So you can set up, just like a computer responsive survey. There’s something that we call branching logic in VA REDCap where you can have questions show or hide based off of the answer to the previous question. But for having an automatic survey conducted by a phone system, that’s not something that is able to be done with VA REDCap. So if you’re used to using a university REDCap system there may be one that is set up with that capability because there is a capability in the REDCap software to set that up. But because of some of the restrictions on use that we have, we’re not able to set up the automatic phone survey feature with VA REDCap. So it’s more that that latter of the work around where you end up having staff enter the data and conduct the phone survey.

Melissa: Okay, thank you. Next question, what is the IRB process for VA REDCap surveys?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Okay, so the IRB process really doesn’t change whether you’re using VA REDCap or not. We do have some standard texts that you can use to help explain VA REDCap to the IRB reviewers. And just like if you’ve seen one VA, you’ve seen one VA. The same applies to IRBs. So some IRBs have some experience with VA REDCap, others do not. One thing that I think is important to highlight, especially for IRBs that don’t have experience with VA REDCap, is that VA REDCap is an intranet application and it does not have any connection to the outside world, but we still have that restriction of no sensitive data in the system. And that’s because the lack of explicit approval to store sensitive information means that something is not approved. So we’re working on the approval, so that’s something that may change in the future. But the IRB process, you would just list VA REDCap as the location that you would be entering and storing the data.

Melissa: Okay, thank you. I’m seeing a couple of the same questions, so I want to make sure we get that question answered and that is, can you analyze data using REDCap?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Very little. There is some built-in reporting and you can create your own reports, mainly filtering the information that’s displayed and summarized. It pretty much gives you count data. So when you have a radio button, and in our example survey, if you’re saying that it’s, is the level of detail the right amount, yes, no, too little, or no, too much detail, it would give you a count of how many responses fell under each of those three options and what percent went with each of those three options. But it doesn’t really do anything that’s more sophisticated. And some things that you wouldn’t think of as being more sophisticated such as a mean and standard deviation, VA REDCap do not do that. So if it was really designed to do data collection but not data analysis. So the analysis that it gives you is really just kind of like a check-in on how your data collection is doing, but most people export their data into another program for analysis such as SPSS, SAS. Or even for more simple analysis, some people use Excel. But there are a number of formats that you can export your data into. But for most projects, the reporting features that are built in are not sufficient for the analysis, unfortunately.

Melissa: Okay, thank you. You just answered a couple more questions about the exporting process.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Oh, okay.

Melissa: So next question.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: That’s good.

Melissa: A couple questions here about sharing the datasets once they’re collected. Are you able to share the datasets?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Yes. So technically, yes, you can share your dataset by, there are a few different ways. One is by giving somebody else access to your project so that, and with permission to view the data. You can also set individual permissions on whether somebody has the rights to export the data from the project. You can download the data from the project and then work with your local ISO on the most appropriate method to use to share that with somebody that’s outside of the VA, for example. So on the mechanics of using VA REDCap, there are two general approaches. One is to give someone access to the data that’s in VA REDCap, and another approach is to export the data from VA REDCap and then use some method to get it to the other person or other people that you want to share the data with.

Melissa: Okay, great. There’s a question about a LimeSurvey. Do you know aby more about LimeSurvey and whether or not it’s more effective than REDCap or vice versa?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: I have absolutely no idea about LimeSurvey, but if you could contact me and let me know, the person that is asking that, and let me know a little bit about it. So one of the things with VA REDCap is we do have two big limitations in that it’s a intranet application only, which means that people outside of the VA are not able to respond to surveys in VA REDCap. And the other main limitation is that we can’t have PHI or PII in VA REDCap. So I’m constantly on the lookout for other survey applications or programs if somebody’s had success using another application that does not have some of those same limitations, if you use those at the VA, and then I can add it to my list of things that I tell people about when they are not able to get done what they need to with VA REDCap because of those limitations. So I would like to learn more about it, but I don’t know.

Melissa: Thank you. There are also a couple questions here on OMB requirements and OASC approvals. Do you have any more resources to point to where people can find additional information about the approval requirement?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: So for, yeah. So OASC, so that link that was on the slide, that goes to a page that explains in more detail about the requirements for what they are charted to review as well as how to submit it for review. So they ask, like they want to have a copy of your survey instrument, but they want to know what your survey frame is. So who are you targeting with the survey? When are you planning on sending it out? How many people, etc? And I believe it’s an email submission process right now. There’s also, on that same page, there’s a guide that you can download that talks a little bit more about some of the other considerations when you’re doing surveys of VA employees.

So for example, the survey that I used as an example of our feature presentation survey, that’s really to evaluate educational intervention. It’s not a research survey, so you don’t need to have IRB approval for that kind of survey. However, if you’re surveying more than 10 or more people at different sites, so say that we had 20 people attend our session and they were all from different VA sites and 12 people responded to our survey, then that would be meeting the criteria to have OASC review and approve our survey to be conducted.

Melissa: Okay. Thank you. The next question is regarding, actually, the next couple questions are regarding some timelines.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Okay.

Melissa: The first one is regarding if you have any idea on the timeline for when the issue regarding storing PHI and PII will be resolved? And then the other question regarding timeline is whether you have a timeline regarding an outfacing or an internet version of VA REDCap for, to allow Veterans to respond.

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Unfortunately, no on both of those counts. I really don’t know the timeline on either one of those. For the approval to be able to store PHI or PII, I’m hoping for the end of this fiscal year, but I really have no way of knowing. And then to have the outfacing or the truly public-facing surveys capabilities, the current configuration of VA REDCap, one of the restrictions for use of the REDCap software itself is that it has to be an intranet-only application. So I’m not expecting that they would make a change to the back end of the software that’s causing that restriction. So I do know that the VA is working on identifying different alternatives. So right now if you need an outfacing survey capability to be able to, for example, email Veterans a survey link to have them complete a survey for your study, the one option that I know of is to contract with WESTAT, which is a survey research company. So they went through the process to get what’s called an authority to operate with the VA and they have a Fisma High enclave and just public-facing survey capability, but that’s software as a service, so you would have to have funding to do that type of contracting. So if you want any more information about WESTAT and where to find more about that option, just send me an email and I’ll provide you with additional information.

Melissa: Okay, thank you. Asking for some clarification, was that WESTAT?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Yes, it’s W-E-S-T-A-T.

Melissa: Thank you. Let’s see, you mentioned one of the pitfalls of VA REDCap is that you can’t store PHI or PII. Can you clarify what you meant when you mentioned you can choose whether or not you want the survey to be anonymous or not. Wouldn’t it always need to be anonymous since we can’t store PHI/PII?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: So for a Veteran survey, it would have to be anonymous. You might provide them with a unique study ID or a study code that has no relation to their name or other information about them, that you might use to match with a key later outside of VA REDCap to be able to identify it, but you would not be able to have somebody who is a Veteran put in their name. However, if you’re doing a VA employee survey, you may want to have their name or email address, which VA email addresses contain our names. So it’s, having an identifiable survey is more, with VA REDCap is more if you’re conducting a VA employee survey. But there are also times if you want to have something that’s anonymous, but you could, in theory, have an identifiable Veteran survey but you would have to have the method to provide a unique identifier that’s not related to the patient’s name, date of birth, ID number, etc., and have that as part of your approved research protocol to do that. But it’s possible.

Melissa: Yeah, thank you. Are the instruments within REDCap stored in catalogs so that, like for example, a patient satisfaction survey that’s administered for one research project can then be used again for a different project?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: Yeah, so there are a number of ways to share instruments between projects. So one, you can download the instrument file and upload it to another project. You can copy entire projects. If you want to share a project from VA REDCap to another organization that uses a REDCap system, so say you have a multisite study, some of the sites are within the VA and some of the sites are outside of the VA and you have an academic affiliate that has REDCap, you might use the same project structure but have the VA sites enter data into VA REDCap and the non-VA sites enter data into the University REDCap. And then the, if you’re using the same project structure, then the data file would have the same structure so that would make it easier at the point where that data is being combined at the coordinating center.

There’s also something that’s called the REDCap library where you can share instruments. So there are some standard instruments like the PHQ-9. There a lot of quality of life instruments that are shared in, it’s actually a nation-wide REDCap library. So we do actually have access to that. There’s also a process to add to that national library as well. So if there is an instrument that you develop that you wanted to share more widely, say that you’re validating a new survey tool and you’re publishing an article about it and you want people to be able to download and start using it in REDCap, there is a way that that can be done as well. But if you do want assistance with that, just contact us at the help desk and we can help you with which option is best for your situation and the mechanics of how to do that.

Melissa: Okay, thank you. I think we have time for possibly one more question. There are still quite a few remaining questions that I will definitely send to Bonnie after the presentation is over to see if we can try to wrap up everyone’s question. This question, surveys for Veterans used to be subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act even if electronic and required OMB approval for greater than nine Veterans. Is that no longer the case?

Dr. Bonnie Paris: That may be the case; I am not sure. So it’s a good question but I’ll look into that and I can respond back to the person who asked that. There’s a lot of guidance that’s on the HSR&D website and also the Office of Research and Development website as far as Veteran surveys. So there are also requirements as far as research approval as well. But I don’t know about that requirement for the Paperwork Reduction Act. I’ll look into it.

Melissa: Okay. Thank you so much, Bonnie. Like I said, there are a few questions left that I will send to Bonnie after the session. But we do want to thank Bonnie. Bonnie, thank you for taking the time to present today’s session. And to our audience, if your questions were not addressed, you can also contact her directly and her contact information was in the slide deck. Please tune in for our next session in VIReC’s Partnered Research Cyberseminar series next week on Tuesday May 22nd at 12 p.m. Eastern. Julian Bruner and Dr. Alison Hamilton from the Empower QUERI will be here to present Implementing Web-Based Interventions at VA, Case Studies in Diabetes Prevention and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Women Veterans. We hope you can make it.

[ END OF AUDIO ]