

Incorporating 2007–2022 Veterans Administration Data into the Cancer Registry in Less than One Month

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SUMMARY

In response to language in the federal FY 2023 Appropriations Bill, the Central Veterans Administration (VA) Cancer Registry provided the Mississippi Cancer Registry (MCR) with more than 11,000 cancer cases for Mississippi residents in the VA Cancer Registry. Unfortunately, this file was transferred on October 31, 2024, and the National Program of Cancer Registries (NPCR) annual data submission deadline was November 30, 2024. Including these cases in the updated cancer statistics required registry staff to develop a process to incorporate them in the registry database quickly, efficiently, and accurately. The resulting plan was successful.

CHALLENGES

- The Coastal VA Hospital had not reported cases to the MCR since 2009 since they were not required to follow the state cancer reporting law. This affects the cancer incidence rates in the Coastal area of the state.
- A process had to be developed to share cases from the Central VA System with state registries.
- State cancer registries were instructed to work with the local VA hospitals to get the cases, but the hospital on the Mississippi Coast did not have a cancer registry contact.
- On October 31, 2024, the Central VA Cancer Registry transferred more than 11,000 cases to the MCR for any Mississippi resident in the Central VA Cancer Registry System. MCR needed to submit their annual cancer data to NPCR by November 30, 2024.

SOLUTION

The MCR used linkages to eliminate cases that had already been submitted by the Coastal VA. This reduced the volume of cases. Modified steps were developed to process the cases by new patients, new primary cancers, or new reports on an existing primary cancer using CDC's Registry Plus software.

RESULTS

The MCR staff were able to complete modified data processing, and the data were incorporated in the November 2024 submission file. The following steps were developed to process the cases:

1. The MCR director linked the Coastal VA hospital cases using probabilistic matching to eliminate cases the MCR had received from that facility in past submissions. This reduced the number to about 4,000 cases.
2. Edits were corrected in each file, and common quality issues were reviewed in the cases and corrected.

3. The files of cases were loaded in CDC's Registry Plus database system, which conducted some automated linkage of patients and tumors. More than 2,400 cases still needed to be processed to determine new patients and primaries and to consolidate this new report with prior reports from other facilities.
4. The MCR director and manager decided to complete all cases for diagnosis year 2022. For other years, new patients and primary tumors would be processed completely. If a cancer case could replace an existing death certificate only case, the case would be completed. Lastly, for cases already in CRS Plus software, staff would only process cases that would cause a change in birthdate, race, county of residence, diagnosis date, primary site, histology, or behavior.
5. All certified staff participated in processing these cases. We learned this process would work when we have a large data submission that must be completed in a short time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Next steps include completing the record processing prior to November 2025. Incorporating these cases was successful in reducing the death certificate only cases for all years involved and will provide more accurate incidence rates, especially for the Coastal region of Mississippi.