

# Frequently Asked Questions

About the  
National Hospital Care Survey



**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention**  
National Center for  
Health Statistics



# Frequently Asked Questions

## About the National Hospital Care Survey

### 1. What is the National Hospital Care Survey?

The National Hospital Care Survey (NHCS) provides nationally representative health care statistics on inpatient care, as well as care delivered in emergency departments (EDs), outpatient departments (OPDs), and hospital-based and freestanding ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs). Information about NHCS can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs.htm>.

### 2. Who is sponsoring NHCS? What is the National Center for Health Statistics?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is sponsoring NHCS. NCHS is the Nation's principal health statistics agency and is responsible for assessing the health status and health care needs of people in the United States. More information about NCHS can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>.

### **3. What are the patient privacy and confidentiality issues?**

NCHS is required by law to keep all data regarding patients and hospitals strictly confidential and to use these data only for research and statistical purposes, as stated in Section 308(d) of the Public Health Service Act [42 USC 242m(d)] and Section 513 of the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA, PL 107–347). All protected health information will be kept confidential and will be used only by NCHS staff, contractors, and agents—only when required and with necessary controls. CIPSEA also includes provisions for a felony conviction and/or a fine of up to \$250,000 if NCHS staff or any NCHS contractor staff violates the confidentiality provisions.

The National Hospital Care Survey has been approved by the NCHS Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research study, please call the Research Ethics Review Board at NCHS, toll-free, at 1–800–223–8118. Please leave a brief message with your name and phone number, and say that you are calling about Protocol 2009–21. Your call will be returned as soon as possible.

### **4. Are there HIPAA implications for the hospital as a result of participating in the NHCS?**

NHCS is being conducted under the auspices of CDC/NCHS (federal government). Special provisions within HIPAA permit hospitals to provide data to public health entities such as CDC/NCHS for purposes such as NHCS.

The HIPAA Privacy Rule recognizes (i) the legitimate need for public health authorities and others responsible for ensuring the public’s health and safety to have access to protected health information to conduct their missions, and (ii) the importance of public health reporting by covered entities in identifying threats to the public and individuals. The Privacy Rule permits (i) protected health information disclosures without written patient authorization for specified public health purposes, to public health authorities legally authorized to collect and receive the information for such purposes; and (ii) disclosures that are required by state and local

public health or other laws [HIPAA regulations (45 CFR 164.501)]. Thus, HIPAA permits hospitals such as yours to participate in studies of this nature for public health purposes. Because contractors serve as authorized agents of NCHS, it is permissible to disclose data to NCHS contractors for the purposes of this project. HIPAA also permits covered entities to obtain the documentation and rely on the approval of one IRB or privacy board. In this case, the hospital may rely on the approval of the NCHS IRB.

## 5. How can my hospital and staff benefit from participating in NHCS?

Participation in NHCS is voluntary. It is important to participate because your hospital and other hospitals like yours can benefit from being represented in the national description of health care utilization in hospitals. Further, NHCS benefits hospitals by collecting data used to make national estimates of hospital care against which individual hospitals may compare themselves. Also, research findings using the data collected may help hospitals to better care for patients.

We are offering each hospital \$500 initially, to partially offset the costs of setting up the processes and procedures to electronically transmit the Uniform Bill (UB)–04 (administrative claims) data to NCHS. At the end of each year of data collection, hospitals will receive an additional \$500 for participation. In addition, hospital staff who specialize in health information management may be eligible to receive continuing education credits for completing a short online training course to learn about participation in NHCS. This informative training can be found at:

[http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs/continuing\\_education.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs/continuing_education.htm).

## 6. Who is conducting NHCS?

RTI International, an independent, nonprofit research organization based in North Carolina, is under contract to NCHS to conduct NHCS. Social and Scientific Systems (SSS), a subcontractor to RTI, will be recruiting hospitals on behalf of NCHS. More information about RTI can be found at: <http://www.rti.org>. Information about SSS can be found at: <http://www.s-3.com>.

## 7. What will be expected of us if our hospital agrees to participate in NHCS?

Starting in 2011, participation in NHCS will include the following:

- Being contacted by NCHS contractor staff to hear about the study and answer questions to confirm that your hospital is eligible to participate in NHCS.
- Identifying a primary contact within the hospital who will be responsible for enrolling the hospital in NHCS, answering questions about the hospital, and electronically transmitting the UB–04 data on a quarterly basis for all inpatients discharged from the hospital.
- Completing a short, self-administered facility questionnaire that provides additional information about the characteristics of your hospital.

You may be asked to participate in special studies on occasion; participation in these studies will be voluntary.

In 2013, participation in NHCS will include the following:

- Continuing to submit UB–04 data on a quarterly basis for all inpatients discharged from the hospital.
- Providing information to determine the eligibility of your hospital's ED and/or OPDs and/or ASCs to participate in NHCS.
- Identifying hospital contacts who will enroll the ambulatory units in NHCS.
- Allowing abstraction of medical records data from sampled visits to the ambulatory units.

All NHCS activities will be conducted either at participating hospitals or by telephone. No travel will be required of hospital staff.

## 8. How many records from our hospital will we need to transmit to you?

We are asking hospitals to electronically submit all the data elements from the UB-04 form for all inpatients discharged from the hospital. For the ambulatory components, a sample of visits will be abstracted from medical records data.

## 9. How much information will you need about the hospital?

Hospital information includes questions on the following:

- Hospital characteristics (e.g., total number of discharges for the year and ownership type).
- Clinical capabilities and services (e.g., Does the hospital have an ED? What is the trauma level rating of the ED?).
- Types of revenue sources.
- Health information technology (HIT) (e.g., In which areas in the hospital does HIT function?).

## 10. How much hospital staff time will participation require?

Once your hospital decides to participate in the survey in 2011, you will be contacted to arrange the following:

- An Induction Interview, to be completed once to obtain general information to facilitate data transmissions from your hospital. This is estimated to take 1 hour, including answering any questions you may have.
- Completion of a Facility Questionnaire that contains more specific information about hospital characteristics, financial information, staffing, and HIT. This is a self-administered questionnaire and is estimated to take approximately 2 hours to complete.
- Creation of an electronic file of discharged inpatients in a specified format to be transmitted to NCHS on a quarterly basis. We estimate that this will require approximately 1 hour each

time. However, we recognize that the actual time required may vary across hospitals.

In 2013, you will be contacted to arrange the following:

- Completion of Ambulatory Induction Interviews to inform ED, OPD, and/or ASC unit contacts about the survey and to obtain general information to facilitate data abstraction from these units. These interviews are estimated to take 1 hour, including answering any questions you may have.
- Completion of ED, OPD, and/or ASC Unit Questionnaires, which contain more-specific information about unit characteristics, patient volume, staffing, and services offered. These are estimated to take approximately 1 hour to complete per form.
- The availability of medical records for abstraction from sampled visits to selected ED, OPD, and/or ASC units.

## **11. How did you select our hospital to participate?**

Your hospital was selected randomly from all hospitals in the United States. Selections were made to obtain enough hospitals of different sizes, service types, and geographical locations to ensure that the hospitals in our study are nationally representative.

## **12. Can another hospital participate instead of us?**

Your hospital was randomly chosen to provide representative data not only for its own services but also for similar hospitals in the United States. For statistical reasons, it is not possible to substitute another hospital. If we replaced your hospital with another hospital, this might introduce bias or inaccuracies into the data we collect. This would severely hinder our ability to make estimates about the amount and types of care provided, as well as the types of patients served, in the entire United States and in hospitals like yours.

### **13. Who else is participating in NHCS?**

The identity of your hospital and other hospitals participating in this study is confidential. No data will be shared among hospitals.

### **14. What will happen with the information we give you?**

All information collected will be the property of NCHS and will be kept strictly confidential. The identity of specific hospitals or individual patients will not be released in any manner except to NCHS staff, contractors, and agents—only when required and with necessary controls. Results of the study will be published only in an aggregated manner that will not allow identification of any individual hospital or patient.

### **15. How long will our hospital be in this study? Will we need to provide information on an ongoing or long-term basis?**

The survey is designed to collect data from your hospital on an ongoing basis, until a new sample of hospitals is inducted. We do not know when a new sample will be drawn, but it will not be for several years.

### **16. Do we need to let our patients know that we are accessing their records for NHCS?**

HIPAA and the Privacy Rule permit disclosure of protected health information and medical record information without written patient authorization, for specific public health purposes, to public health authorities and their authorized agents, including federal public health agencies such as CDC, of which NCHS is a part. Thus, HIPAA regulations (45 CFR 164.501) do not require you to obtain patient authorization prior to disclosing protected health information to NCHS or to RTI and SSS, as authorized agents of NCHS.

If a patient requests information about disclosures of his or her protected health information, the Privacy Rule requires hospitals to keep accounting documentation for 6 years. NCHS has developed an accounting document for NHCS participating hospitals that facilitates their response to patient requests

regarding such disclosures. An accounting document will be provided to your hospital during the 2011 national survey to simplify your recordkeeping and for your convenience in complying with this requirement. Although NHCS data collection will involve more than 50 records, hospitals are not required to account for the disclosures of information about any particular individual.

## **17. Why are you collecting Social Security numbers?**

The Social Security number is collected to allow linkage with administrative databases such as Medicare and with vital records such as the National Death Index (NDI). For example, we plan to link to NDI, a computerized central file of death record information, to measure postdischarge mortality. NCHS compiles the NDI from data collected by state vital statistics offices. Records are matched using Social Security number and other variables such as name, date of birth, sex, and state of residence. By law, your sharing of this information is voluntary, and whether it is provided or not will have no effect on a patient's benefits. Only NHCS project staff, contractors, and agents working directly on NHCS will have access to this information.

## **18. Whom do I contact for more information?**

You may contact the SSS Recruitment Manager, Ms. Lourdes Suárez, at **877-321-6437**. You may also contact Dr. Carol DeFrances, Team Leader of the Hospital Care Team, NCHS, at **301-458-4440**; or Mr. David Woodwell, Team Leader of the Ambulatory Care Team, NCHS, at **301-458-4592**.

## **19. OK, I'm interested in participating in NHCS. What's the next step?**

NHCS contractor staff will follow up with a telephone call to identify a primary contact at your hospital and will set up another call for further discussion with the hospital contact and other designated hospital personnel.

# **National Hospital Care Survey**

Visit the survey website:

[\*http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs.htm\*](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs.htm)