FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q.   What does HCRIS stand for?
A.   Healthcare Cost Reporting Information System.

Q.   What cost reports are collected?
A.   HCRIS collects data from the Hospital Cost Report (CMS-2552-96 and CMS-2552-10), Skilled Nursing Facility Cost Report (CMS-2540-96 and 2540-10), Home Health Agency Cost Report(CMS-1728-94), Renal Facility Cost Report (CMS-265-94) and Hospice Cost Report (CMS-1984-99), Rural Health Clinic/Federally Qualified Health Center (222-92); and Community Mental Health Center (2088-92).

Q.   Does HCRIS collect the entire cost report?
A.   HCRIS does not collect all the data from the 2552-96, 2540-96, and the 1728-94 cost reports. We collect a subset of this data. Hospital, HHA and SNF collect a large extract of data from the calculated cost report. The worksheet forms in these system's documentation zip files have X's in the fields that are collected in HCRIS if reported by the facility.

HCRIS collects the entire cost report for the Renal and Hospice for cost reports with fiscal years ending on or after 12/31/2004.

HCRIS collects all the data from the new Hospital 2552-10 and SNF 2540-10 if reported by the facility.

We also collect all the data for the CMHC and FQH/RHC if reported by the facility; however we collect this data beginning with fiscal year 2010.

Q.   How do I determine what each data point means?
A   HCRIS data is defined for each system in a chapter of the Provider Reimbursement Manual. There are links to it on the web pages.

Q.   How do I get the HCRIS files?
A.   The cost report files are all available for download from the following website: http://www.cms.hhs.gov/CostReports/ in the Cost Reports by Fiscal Year section or at the bottom of the system's section page

Q.   I'm having trouble with the download. Can you help?
A.   The downloads, especially for Hospital and SNF, are very large. Many people have been able to successfully download the files. The biggest problem people experience when downloading is that they do not have enough space in their target location. Others have had their connection time out due to their ISP, their modem, or an Internet router problem, but the biggest problem is space.

Q.   How do I unzip the files once downloaded?

A.   Use WinZip 8.0 or higher

Q.   Does the HCRIS-Hospital Cost Report files contain all hospitals that file cost reports?

A.   All Medicare Certified providers that file cost reports are present on the files if they have been submitted by their Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) and have passed all HCRIS edits.

Q.   What types of information are included in the Documentation and Reports downloads?

A.   There are a lot of supplemental files in the Documentation and Reports download.

1. README file as a guide
2. Cost Report Worksheet forms where the HCRIS report is a subset of the forms in the provider re-imbursement manual.
3. Worksheet Indicator definitions
4. Count report of total cost reports received to date and total cost reports for each cost report status
5. Adobe PDF relational data model
6. SQL code to create the tables
7. Data Dictionary.
8. For each subsystem application, you will find also excel spreadsheets Explaining MCR, Provider Control Type, Type of Facility and Cost Center Codes if applicable.
9. The provider ID file which includes name and address information for all providers on file.
10. Miscellaneous reports specific to a subsystem

Q.   In what format are the data files available?

A.   The cost report data is in 3 files (4 for Hospital, SNF and HHA) that are comma delimited.
The *_Rpt file contains cost report identification information such as the provider number, the fiscal year beginning and ending date, the status of the cost report (settled, as submitted, reopened), the type of ownership of the hospital, etc.
The *_Rpt_Nmrc file contains all numeric data reported on a cost report such as costs, charges, ratios, number of beds, etc.
The *_Rpt_Alphnmrc file contains all alpha data reported on a cost report such as hospital name, address, dates, and questions that require a 'yes' response.
The *_Rollup file contains fields from the cost center coded worksheets that have been calculated. See file named Rollup_Description.doc.
*=subsystem

Q.   What software packages handle the data?

A.   Most of our data users are loading the data into Oracle, SAS, SPSS Statistical Package, Microsoft SQL Server, and DB2. (2/20/2004)

Q. Can the data be loaded into Microsoft Access?
A. The Hosp_Rpt_Nmrc and Snf_Rpt_Nmrc files exceed 2GB, so at this time, no.

Q. What fields are available in this database?
A. Refer to the Worksheet Forms in your download or the Provider Reimbursement Manual

Q. When are the Cost Report Data Files updated?
A. The files are updated on a quarterly basis and are generally available by the end of the month following the quarterly cutoff date. The quarters are March 31, June 30, September 30, and, December 31.

Q. Is there a common data element that will join all tables?
A. The report record number (Rpt_Rec_Num) is the unique identifier that is contained in all of the data files. It is the primary key in each subsystem.

Q. If you are a provider and do not see your HCRIS data for a particular year, why is this?
A. This is more than likely because HCRIS rejected the file, and the Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) did not correct and resubmit the file. Please contact your MAC.

Q. What do IME 1, IME 2, DSH 1, and DSH 2 mean in the IME_GME report?
A. You should add IME 1 and IME 2 together to get a total of IME for the year. These amounts are reported at different times during the reporting period and are captured separately in the cost report.
This is the same for the DSH.

Q. What is a Crosswalk?
A. If you have been using a form that has been revised, i.e. 2552-96 which has been superseded by 2552-10, the crosswalk will list where similar data items can be found in both forms.

Q. I can't find a field that I use a lot in the new form or in the crosswalk. Help?
A. The crosswalks are works-in-progress. Some old fields translate directly into the new form. Other fields may be dropped or have their definitions changed. If you don't see your fields in the crosswalk and the provider reimbursement manual does not clarify the problem, please contact HCRIS via email. We will be glad to help.

Q. How far back is data collected for each of the cost reports?
A. HCRIS downloadable files are available for the following fiscal years and forward:
    Hospital – 1996
    SNF – 1996
    HHA- 1994

Renal-1994
Hospice-2000
FQHC/RHC-2010

Q. If HCRIS is in the process of updating the data files for the quarter and a HCRIS file is submitted during this process, when will it be updated to the website?
For example, if HCRIS is in the process of updating the files for the quarter ending March 31, 2013 and a file is submitted on April 10, 2013, when will this report be available on the web?
A. The file submitted on April 10 will be included in the update for the quarter ending June 30, 2013

Q. Why aren't there column headings in the Rpt; Alphanumeric, and Numeric data files??
A. The annual report, alpha and numeric files on the website are not spreadsheets, but are comma separated variable files with CSV extensions which MS Excel can potentially open. They are not intended to be spreadsheets but are raw data files.

The HCRIS CSV files are of two types, raw data, and reports. The raw data files do not have the header data in them as they are normally loaded into databases for analysis; the reports which are included in the "REPORT" zip files for each system DO have the headers as they are small and can easily be opened by MS Excel.

Some of these files are larger than 500 megabytes in size and are approaching 20 million records and growing. MS Excel can open files of type CSV, and separate the variables using the commas; however, simply clicking on most of the larger files and allowing Excel to proceed may result in "locking up" PCs for extended periods and perhaps requiring reboots depending on the resources available on that PC. In this link, http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel-help/excel-specifications-and-limits-HP010342495.aspx?CTT=5&origin=HP005199291 the maximum number of rows in an Excel 2010 spreadsheet are limited to slightly over 1 million, which indicates that Excel is not appropriate for opening many of the HCRIS data files. Earlier versions of Excel have much smaller limits. It is unfortunate that Excel indicates that CSV files are spreadsheets when they are not and may not be compatible.

The CSV file format is an old and common file format, and is useful on Windows, Unix/Linux, Apple and mainframe computers. Some users in these environments who load the data may not have the capability of removing the headers if they were present(especially on the larger files). Additionally, some programs examine the values in the first row of a file to determine the type of data in each column, i.e. number, text, or date. For these programs, the text values in a header row may cause confusion or error.

From a compatibility perspective, not having headers in the data files ensures that the files can be loaded by users who may or may not have the ability to handle header rows.