

VA privacy rules clamp down on cancer data

U.S. Veterans Affairs hospitals have stopped providing state registries with information on cancer patients because of privacy concerns.

The Veterans Affairs Department said it will not provide the data, which is used to compile cancer rates and investigate unusual cancer clusters, until states sign a new directive setting conditions for using patients' personal information, The New York Times said Wednesday.

While a few states have signed the directive, others say the rules are too difficult to meet.

Other hospitals are required by state laws to submit information, including name, address, age, race and medical history. The newspaper said the National Cancer Institute's cancer statistics next summer will be missing data from VA patients. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also relies on the information.

The directive requires that researchers get permission from the VA's undersecretary of health or find a VA researcher to work with before they can access patient information. The data must also be encoded so unauthorized people cannot read it.

A California epidemiologist says cancer researchers say they have no idea how they will meet the conditions, the newspaper said.

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