Q&A with Elizabeth Carter, Director of the Healthcare Workforce Data for the Virginia Department of Healthcare Professionals

Elizabeth A. Carter, Ph.D. is the current Director for the Department of Health Professions Healthcare Workforce Data Center. Dr. Carter is also the Executive Director for the Virginia Board of Health Professions where she has served since 2002.

VLDS: What first interested you about VLDS?

Dr. Carter: The Department of Health Professions' mission is to ensure safe and competent patient care by licensing health professionals, enforcing standards of care, and providing information to health care practitioners and the public. The Governor established the Healthcare Workforce Data Center within the agency in 2008 with Workforce Investment Act funding. Its charge is to improve the data collection and measurement of Virginia's healthcare workforce through regular assessment of workforce supply and demand issues among the professions licensed through the 13 boards housed within the Department. Code of Virginia §54.1-2506.1 (A) authorizes the Department's collection and dissemination of aggregate workforce data, but also ensures the confidentiality of individually identifiable information.
I first became aware of significant accomplishments of VLDS at the Virginia Secretaries' Summit on Analytics in September. This event was jointly hosted by the Secretaries of Health and Human Resources and Technology. The event's aim was to spur innovation by state agencies to better leverage the Commonwealth's data for greater efficiencies and enhanced problem solving, yet continue to safeguard privacy and systems security. VLDS clearly embodies a best practices approach to facilitating efficient and responsible data sharing in the furtherance of educational and workforce research and policy development. It is a working model of how to effectively provide consistent, analytics-quality data from all participating agencies.

The Department of Health Professions is pursuing membership to provide Healthcare Workforce Data Center's profession-specific survey data to spur research in this area. Currently, surveys are incorporated into the licensure renewal processes for 26 professions, including physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, psychologists, physical therapists and others. Ultimately all of the over 80+ professions will be surveyed. Compiled results are reported on the Center's website. The Department has policies in place for releasing de-identified data for legitimate research. But requests, to date, have been limited likely due to the fact that healthcare workforce research is in its infancy and communication among interested parties remains a challenge.

It is hoped that by joining VLDS, the key information available from the Center's data will be much more accessible and more readily integrated with other educational and workforce information to provide greater insights for policy makers, researchers and the general public.

VLDS: Tell us about the privacy controls, both human and systematic, that you found in place when evaluating VLDS?

Dr. Carter: The greatest key to ensuring privacy is ongoing, restricted data use governance policies of VLDS and the technical capability that DOUBLE de-identifies personal-level data. Participating agencies enter into a formalized agreement that acknowledges specific duties, including ongoing Governance Board responsibilities, data security requirements and more. In addition, the system automatically hashes the personal identification data, not once, but twice. This speaks volumes about the dedication to ensuring that confidential information is protected by the partner agencies that make up VLDS.

VLDS: What sorts of insights do you hope to gain through VLDS research?

Dr. Carter: The list of topics is endless, but one of the most pressing needs is for policymakers to have increased insights into the veterans' educational, licensure, and employment status.

Veteran unemployment for the young and transitioning service members has outpaced that of the general population. One of the fastest growing civilian employment sectors is healthcare. The knowledge and skills medics gain in the military can be translated to apply to the civilian world's needs with supplemental education and training. To that end, Virginia has been participating in the National Governors' Association Veterans' Licensure and Certification Demonstration Policy Academy with five other states. The aim has been to complete gap analyses, develop bridge curricula and otherwise to develop strategies to reduce the time and costs to complete the requirements for certification and licensure.

A chief impediment identified in the study, one that most states will likely encounter, is the lack of consistent, electronically available data on the individual's branch of service, military occupational code, and discharge date. Military training is mission driven and varies by branch and over time. As a result of the Academy, it is anticipated that new veterans' variables will be included in the future in relevant federal and state agency databases. This will help better establish clear baselines and improve tracking of the potential outcomes of initiatives.

Apps4VA Piloting Program to Teach High Schoolers to Make Education Apps

Beginning in the spring 2013 semester, a partnership among Virginia Department of Education, the James Madison University Computer Science department and Center for Innovative Technology launched Apps4VA JMU, a course that challenged computer science classes to base their semester projects on App4VA goals using VLDS data. Their challenge: "Create an app that uses education data in unique ways." Students in CS474 classes, taught by Professor Chris Mayfield, formed teams to conceptualize apps that might be useful for parents, students, educators or policymakers. By the end of the course, the teams refined their concepts into prototypes. According to Mayfield, "A major benefit of this project-based learning approach is that students have a meaningful running example throughout the course." To date, 140 students and 2 professors have participated in the challenge.

Encouraged by the enthusiasm and creativity of the JMU students, the Apps4VA team decided to expand the program, this time to a Richmond-area high school. Lynn Norris, the department chair at Deep Run High School's Center for Information Technology, connected with Mayfield during the Computer Science Teaching Academy hosted at JMU this summer. During a session focused on the Apps4VA JMU program, student apps were highlighted. Teachers took part in a discussion on how the program was designed and administered, heard testimonials from students and faculty, and participated in a guided hands-on tour of the data. At the end of the session, the

Apps4VA team explained that they were interested in piloting a similar program adapted for high school students, which would offer them an opportunity to take on real-world challenges while still in high school. Apps4VA JMU alumni would be recruited to mentor the high school students. Norris volunteered the students in her program to pilot the newly designed Apps4VA HS program.

This spring, four teams of about 20 students from Deep Run's Center for Information Technology will participate in a pilot program modeled after the university class. The goals of the program are to help students to gain a greater understanding of how to use and navigate data sets, build an application from back end to front end, and develop an effective application while working with a team. The program will provide an overview of how the layers of a program come together and communicate to form a whole application. More information about the program will be posted on the Apps4VA website.

Save the Date

The 2015 Insights Conference will be held on Tuesday, June 30, 2015 on the Stafford Campus of the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg.

Tod Massa Interviewed by Inside Higher Ed on the Technical Advice He Gave to the U.S. Dept. of Education for their College Rankings Framework

Behind the Ratings
By: Michael Stratford

Friday's release of a college ratings "framework" was a relatively anticlimactic milestone that capped months of speculation, delays and sometimes-fierce criticism from higher education leaders.

The U.S. Department of Education published just a handful of pages of information, most of which underscore what officials have been saying publicly for months. There are, however, some new details about how the administration plans to approach the ratings. And the department released an expanded version on Friday. Read the full article on Inside Higher Ed...>

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