

## NCHS Undertakes New National Hospital Care Survey

*Editor's note:* the following information from the National Center for Health Statistics describes its upcoming new National Hospital Care Survey, which combines two previous surveys and is intended to provide information about encounters of care across various hospital settings.

An essential component to improving healthcare in America is the availability of comprehensive, integrated information on patterns of healthcare utilization across various settings. The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) now has taken an important step to enhance the quality and scope of hospital and freestanding ambulatory surgery center statistics. NCHS has monitored the Nation's healthcare utilization through the National Hospital Discharge Survey (NHDS) since 1965 and ambulatory care utilization through the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey (NHAMCS) since 1992. These surveys have been conducted annually to meet the need for information on hospitalizations, and visits to emergency (ED) and outpatient (OPD) departments and ambulatory surgery centers (ASC).

Although these two surveys have separately tracked our Nation's hospital care, NCHS has decided to increase their reach by combining NHDS and NHAMCS into one survey. This new survey will be called the National Hospital Care Survey (NHCS) and will be phased in over several years. Beginning in 2011, 500 hospitals will be asked to electronically transmit their Uniform Bill (UB)-04 administrative claims for all hospital discharges. In 2013, in addition to the inpatient component, the data collection will expand to include visits to emergency departments, outpatient departments, and hospital-based and freestanding ambulatory surgery centers.

The NHCS will provide a unique opportunity to examine encounters of care across inpatient, ED, OPD, and ASC settings. The encounters may be linked to the National Death Index to measure post-discharge mortality, and to Medicare and Medicaid data to get a more complete picture of patients' care. Hospitals may be asked to participate in special studies that address specific research and policy questions.

NCHS is moving toward greater collection of health care data by electronic means with the electronic transmission of the UB-04 claims data for all hospital inpatients for the inpatient component of the NHCS. As hospitals adopt electronic health records (EHRs), NCHS will be poised to accept electronic files from hospital medical records for all components of the NHCS. This will greatly enrich the hospital data available to researchers and policy makers across the United States.

NHCS will continue to provide national health-care statistics on inpatient care and visits to EDs, OPDs, and ASCs. The new survey will help paint a clearer picture of today's health care environment and address a broad range of policy and research questions that will be important to making health care and health policy decisions in the future. For more information about the NHCS see: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs.htm).