To: VQI Regional Group Medical Directors, SVS PSO Governing Council, and Quality Committees

From: Adam Beck, Chair, SVS PSO Governing Council; Jens Eldrup-Jorgensen, SVS PSO Medical Director

Re: Method to collect ad hoc data elements in VQI

Many regional groups and the SVS PSO Quality Committees have requested the addition of new variables to the VQI registry for specific new quality improvement or quality research projects. Many of these may be temporary, with decisions about long term usefulness dependent on initial evaluation. To avoid the cost and time delay associated with adding new specific variables to the modules, FIVOS has developed a flexible data capture mechanism to meet this need with their Pathways system.

This new system uses the concept of hashtags to separate and identify discrete variables, which can be entered into the existing comments section of each data form. Each **Tag** must follow the **#[Tag:value] format**, where 'Tag' is the unique variable name and the 'value' is a numeric or textual value. Any number of Tags may be placed in the comments section as long as they are **separated by at least one space**. The procedure and the follow-up forms utilize independent comments fields, such that comments (and therefore Tags) can be easily associated to the procedure or the follow-up. See examples below.

Data entered as Tags for a particular project will be available in blinded datasets. PSO will include a dedicated 'Tags' column in any blinded dataset upon request. This column will include Tags utilized in the comments section of the dataset that apply to the project.   The comments field is also included in the "Procedure & Follow-Up Data Download" report for each center, enabling individual centers to easily access all their Tag data.

To avoid confusion or inadvertent duplication of Tag names being used by different projects, the SVS PSO staff will maintain a library of all approved Tags, and the potential values for each Tag (variable). Tag use must be approved by each regional group, for a regional quality or research project, and the information appropriately communicated to SVS PSO staff. For VQI wide or multi-regional projects, the SVS PSO Quality Committees or Research Advisory Committee must approve the proposed use of Tags before they will be entered into the Tag Library.

The hashtag-based solution provided by FIVOS is extremely flexible and allows regional groups to collect data quickly and efficiently. However, there is no error or range checking upon data entry, so each group using this system must take full responsibility for quality of data.

We believe that this method provides an efficient way for various projects to be implemented immediately. While dedicated variables in each data form would be ideal, the hashtag method allows us to test new variables quickly, conduct temporary projects, and use this information to then justify the higher cost of permanent creation of new variables in the data forms. This approach has been approved by the SVS PSO Governing Council.

Requests for projects requiring tags that have been approved by a regional group or requests for national tag projects by the SVS PSO Quality Committee or Research Advisory Committee should be forwarded to Melissa Latus (mlatus@svspso.org). (Requests must contain the abstract of the approved project, the list of each tag and name requested, and the options for values of each tag. Melissa will assist in name designation to avoid overlap and return the final list of tag names and values. Project owners will then be responsible for distributing this information to participating sites, with instructions to ensure that the tags and values are correctly entered.

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Hashtag examples

Example 1:

A regional group wishes to monitor whether smoking cessation counseling was offered at time of discharge.

1.   New variable = smokcs (smoking counseling), with options = yes or no
2.   Hashtag would be entered as: #[smokcs:yes] or #[smokcs:no]

This illustrates the use of full word in response, i.e., yes or no, which requires more keystrokes but maybe less prone to error than entering numbers to stand for choices.

Example 2:

A regional group wishes to monitor whether nicotine replacement was prescribed at time of discharge.

1.   New variable = nictrx (Nicotine replacement), with options = 0, 1 or 2 where 0=none, 1= patch, 2=gum
2.   Hashtag would be entered as: #[nictrx:0] or #[nictrx:1] or #[nictrx:2]

This illustrates use of numbers for categorical choices as response, which may be more applicable if many choices, or long words with many keystrokes.

Example 3:

A quality research project wishes to track high sensitivity C-reactive protein levels done pre-operatively.

1.   New variable = hscrp (High sensitivity CRP), with options = value of CRP level
2.   Hashtag would be entered as: #[hscrp:value] where value is number

This illustrates the use of numerical values being entered as a variable. The range of allowed values would need to be specified in the instructions to each site participating in the project.

Note that variable names are not case sensitive.

Note that detailed instructions re choices of values and variable names must be provided to each participating site, since confusion would result in erroneous data entry, and there is no built-in error trapping for these variables.

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