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Division

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**Program Evaluation
and Methodology Issue
Area**

Active Assignments

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Foreword

This report was prepared primarily to inform Congressional members and key staff of ongoing assignments in the General Accounting Office's Program Evaluation and Methodology issue area. This report contains assignments that were ongoing as of October 2, 1995, and presents a brief background statement and a list of key questions to be answered on each assignment. The report will be issued quarterly.

This report was compiled from information available in GAO's internal management information systems. Because the information was downloaded from computerized data bases intended for internal use, some information may appear in abbreviated form.

If you have questions or would like additional information about assignments listed, please contact Kwaicheung Chan, Director, Program Evaluation in the Physical System Area on (202) 512-3092; or Mary Hamilton, Director, Program Evaluation in the Human Services Area on (202) 512-7802.

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EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES

TITLE: OPERATION DESERT STORM: EVALUATION OF THE AIR WAR (973364)

BACKGROUND : Two Members asked to be added to the evaluation of the Desert Storm air campaign job originally requested by two Members who are now retired. We have completed our design phase and have briefed the new requesters' staffs.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What were the objectives of the air campaign? (2) How was the campaign planned in terms of allocating aircraft and munitions for different targets? (3) How was the campaign actually carried out? (4) What were the costs and the comparative effectiveness of the weapons?

TITLE: BIOTECHNOLOGY RISKS AND THE ADEQUACY OF REGULATORY AGENCY REVIEWS (973395)

BACKGROUND : Public concern about the safety of certain classes of biotechnology end products, such as food products, has triggered controversy about what risks biotechnology poses. The biotechnology debate in turn has led to questions about how well the federal government, particularly FDA and USDA, addresses these risks through its regulatory processes.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What are the current and emerging biotechnology applications? (2) What risks have been associated with biotechnology introductions? (3) To what extent does the federal regulatory process address the risks associated with these biotechnology introductions?

TITLE: A SURVEY OF ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS IN MEDICAID WAIVER PROGRAMS FOR HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED LONG-TERM CARE (973412)

BACKGROUND : The proposed Health Security Act includes a new home and community-based long-term care benefit for people with disabilities, requiring a uniform needs assessment. It is not known to what extent the assessment process in Medicaid waiver programs results in a comprehensive evaluation of the client.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) Are Medicaid assessment instruments adequate to be used in the implementation of the new disability benefit described in the Health Security Act? (2) How can they be modified to make them useful for this program?

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EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES

TITLE: FDA'S LAYERS OF SAFETY FOR THE BLOOD SUPPLY (973418)

BACKGROUND : The Food and Drug Administration has instituted controls over the collection and distribution of blood products which it has termed "layers of safety." These steps are designed to ensure that contaminated blood and blood products are screened from the nation's blood supply. Nevertheless, patients continue to receive transfusions of infected blood.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What policies and procedures has FDA implemented to ensure that safeguards are in place, and what problems exist in the implementation of each of the five layers of safety? (2) what are the current risk estimates of contracting infectious diseases or other serious health complications from the transfusion of blood products?

TITLE: FDA'S REVIEW OF MEDICAL DEVICES (973425)

BACKGROUND : The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is authorized to regulate medical devices for safety and effectiveness. Different types of tests are required to ensure software safety. As a consequence FDA issued guidelines specifically for computer controlled medical devices. Are these measures for ensuring software safety adequate?

KEY QUESTIONS : Of new devices entering the market under FDA guidelines for computerized medical devices, what percentage experienced problems which may have caused or contributed to death, illness or injury? Of those problems, what percentage were the result of software related errors? What subsequent steps were undertaken by FDA to address software related problems?

TITLE: EPIDEMIOLOGY OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE (973430)

BACKGROUND : Millions of Americans are afflicted with Alzheimer's disease, and the number is expected to rise with the projected increase in the elderly population. Their care requires extensive medical and social resources.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1)What statistics are available on Alzheimer's disease in the U.S.? (2)What federal programs support research? (3)What types of clinical trials and outcomes research studies are conducted in the U.S. and overseas? (4)Identify promising approaches to care for Alzheimer's patients.

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EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES

TITLE: COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDICARE PREPAYMENT SCREENS (973431)

BACKGROUND : GAO has found that most claims are automatically paid without determining the medical necessity of the procedure. At the same time, very little is known about the cost-effectiveness of the pre-payment screens, including the effectiveness of provider profiling in this regard. This study will address these questions.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1)How rigorous are the methods used by HCFA to evaluate cost-effectiveness of prepayment screens? 2)Do these screens impact providers most responsible for denials? 3)How do reversal rates for appealed claims influence cost-effectiveness estimates?

TITLE: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED REGULATORY COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (973433)

BACKGROUND : On June 14, Senator Patrick Leahy asked us to provide him with a chart showing the percentage of national product (GDP) accounted for by certain types of regulatory costs, using data from Thomas Hopkins. The Senate is debating legislation to mandate changes in the way agencies develop regulations, and Hopkins has testified and published estimates of regulatory costs.

KEY QUESTIONS : Using data published by Professor Thomas Hopkins, what percentage of gross domestic product are accounted for by his estimates of the costs of environmental, other social, and economic regulations?

TITLE: VACCINE FOR CHILDREN: DETERMINING POCKETS OF NEED (973435)

BACKGROUND : "Vaccines for Children: Reexamination of Program Goals and Implementation Needed to Ensure Vaccination" (PEMD-95-22) noted that the problem of underimmunization is not universal and is limited to certain population groups and areas, which are often referred to as "pockets of need." However, little is known about how to identify pockets of need.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) What is the capacity of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to identify pockets of need? 2) To what extent do state Medicaid data bases have the potential to identify pockets of need? 3) To what extent do clinical assessment data bases in public health clinics have the potential to identify pockets of need?

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EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES

TITLE: COMPARISON OF COMPETITION, PRODUCTIVITY, AND PRICES IN THE DEFENSE AND CIVILIAN SECTORS (973436)

TITLE: AN EVALUATION OF EPA EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACTIVITIES (973788)

BACKGROUND : The EPA is responsible for providing emergency planning and response for chemical emergencies and disasters. EPA participates in a complex emergency response process that relies greatly on the ability to characterize the health and environmental effects of chemical wastes. Concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of the program.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1. What has been the historical trend in the incidence of chemical emergencies? 2. Are there certain types or categories of chemical emergencies that are more frequent than others? 3. How well prepared is EPA to assess a chemical emergency? 4. How effectively does EPA respond to these events and communicate the associated risks to the public?

TITLE: WHAT PROGRAMS HAVE HELPED UNMARRIED TEENAGE MOTHERS ACHIEVE ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY. (973793)

BACKGROUND : Recent welfare reform efforts have focused on unmarried teenaged mothers and their special risk for welfare dependency. Employment and education programs also aim to increase self-sufficiency and reduce welfare dependency. As part of a joint effort with HEHS to answer the full request under 105592, PEMD will review formal evaluations of such programs.

KEY QUESTIONS : What services or approaches help poor teenaged mothers become self-sufficient and avoid welfare dependency?

Program Evaluation and Methodology

EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES

TITLE: AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT EMPLOYMENT PROVISIONS (973795)

BACKGROUND : The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) includes safeguards against discrimination in the employment of persons with disabilities including hiring, accommodations, promotions, terminations, and benefits. The impact the law has had on the lives of persons with disabilities and on businesses is unknown, but widely speculated upon.

KEY QUESTIONS : What have been the costs and benefits of the employment provisions of the ADA? How has the ADA changed the employment rate for persons with disabilities? How does the composition of the disabled population in the workforce compare to that of the unemployed?

TITLE: WELFARE TO WORK SYNTHESIS (973796)

TITLE: EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPERT SYSTEM TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVING FEDERAL PROGRAM PERFORMANCE (973798)

BACKGROUND : Expert systems are computer programs used in government and business, including the Big 6 accounting firms, to improve productivity and/or reduce expenditures by emulating experts' decision making processes. With the federal government's focus on streamlining its operations, an evaluation of the utility of applying expert systems is needed.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1. Where have expert systems been deployed in civilian federal services? 2. How are they used? 3. What standards have been used to verify, validate and accredit expert system applications? 4. What difference have they made in productivity? 5. Where in the federal government can expert systems be used to increase productivity and aid in downsizing?

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EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES

TITLE: FDA NEW DRUG REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS (973799)

TITLE: STRUCTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY OF HEALTH CARE (973800)

BACKGROUND : The rapid movement toward managed care has blurred the former lines of demarcation between fee-for-service medical practice and health maintenance and other managed care organizations. Little is known about the implications of specific elements of managed care practice (e.g., different ways of paying for physician services) for health care quality.

KEY QUESTIONS : What are the implications of different dimensions of managed care for processes of health care delivery, patients' health outcomes and other quality of care indicators?

TITLE: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND STANDARDS (973851)

BACKGROUND : Title VII of "The Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974" requires, that GAO evaluate programs, develop evaluation methods, and assess evaluation studies. The focus of this continuing effort is to analyze transfer evaluation information on design and methods and ongoing research to cognizant GAO staff, Congressional staff and agency and state evaluators.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) What are the key evaluation related needs currently being addressed by internal and external customers? 2) What existing information/knowledge do we and others currently possess on these issues? 3) What can Congress and federal agencies learn in terms of program evaluation to improve program performance and meet legislative objectives?

Program Evaluation and Methodology

PROPOSED PROGRAMS/POLICIES

TITLE: NUTRITION MONITORING: DATA USERS, TYPES OF USE, AND STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF USE (973403)

BACKGROUND : The nation's nutrition monitoring system has been criticized for poor coordination among the various activities administered by different agencies and for problems with data quality, coverage, and comparability. The Committee asked GAO to examine the current system and evaluate alternative approaches to organizing and conducting nutrition monitoring activities.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) Who are the users of federal nutrition monitoring data? 2) What are the uses of federal nutrition monitoring data? 3) What are the strengths and limitations of the data produced by the current NNMRR program?

TITLE: FUTURE STRATEGIES FOR THE DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE (973421)

BACKGROUND : Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, programs to support defense contractors and manufacturers in the defense industrial base (DIB) have been implemented. However, there is concern that these programs may be subsidizing uncompetitive production facilities at very high and long lasting costs.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1. What are the trends in overall DOD budgets and outlay expenditures over time? 2. How is the level of DOD spending linked to the productivity and financial viability of firms in the defense industrial base and competitiveness within the defense manufacturing industries.

QUALITY OF POLICY INFORMATION

TITLE: ANALYSIS OF THE SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NATIONAL CHOLESTEROL EDUCATION PROGRAM (NCEP) (973389)

BACKGROUND : The cost of public and private efforts to test and lower cholesterol may be as high as \$10 billion annually. In light of these costs, the Committee is interested in the quality of the scientific evidence used to justify such expenditures, particularly as it relates to the guidelines established by the National Cholesterol Education Program.

KEY QUESTIONS : What evidence is there that lowering serum cholesterol: a) reduces risk of CHD; b) reduces the risk of death from CHD; c) extends overall survival? Do outcomes differ for different types of treatment or for different population sub-groups? What evidence regarding these outcomes has been used to support the NCEP guidelines?

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QUALITY OF POLICY INFORMATION

TITLE: EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGY OF DOD'S BOTTOM-UP REVIEW (973404)

BACKGROUND : The requester has asked that PEMD perform a methodological review of DOD's Bottom-Up Review and report back to him in early spring 1994.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What was the methodology of the Bottom-Up Review, and how was it applied? (2) How were major decisions made, and how were they supported by the data and analyses that were performed? (3) What were the methodology and analyses relative to the consolidation of duplicative roles and missions among the military services?

TITLE: ESTIMATING ALL IMMIGRATION STATUSES (973792)

BACKGROUND : Current immigration policy issues would be informed by more accurate data on the numbers of foreign-born persons in specific immigration status categories in local areas. Government agencies do not conduct surveys to collect such data. GAO proposes to explore the feasibility of an alternative to the usual data collection and estimation methods.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What are INS and/or Census Bureau plans, if any, for collecting relevant data--and what do agencies see as the barriers to collecting such data? (2) What are the strengths and limitations of existing data collection approaches? (3) Can the proposed new method be further developed and refined to the point that its practicality is clear?

TITLE: SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES IN LEARNING AND IN THE WORKPLACE (973801)

BACKGROUND : Little is known about successful practices in schools and the workplace. To assist it in performing its program review responsibilities, the Subcommittee seeks information on practices that research results show are successful in learning and in the workplace.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What learning and workplace practices have proven to be successful? (2) What processes, practices, and programs have not worked? (3) What characterizes practices in five successful workplace and school sites? (4) What core factors or benchmark characteristics distinguish successful from unsuccessful practice in each area?

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QUALITY OF POLICY INFORMATION

TITLE: NONIMMIGRANT OVERSTAYERS: INS' ESTIMATION METHODOLOGY NEEDS REVISION (973802)

BACKGROUND : Illegal immigration is reaching crisis proportions. One troubling form of this problem consists of foreign visitors who legally enter the United States, but fail to depart. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimates that visa overstayers are as numerous as illegal border crossers, calling into question the primary focus of U.S. efforts on border security.

KEY QUESTIONS : How valid is INS' estimate of visa overstayers?

TITLE: PILOT WORK AUTHORIZATION STUDIES: HOW ARE THEY BEING EVALUATED? (973804)

BACKGROUND : The Commission on Immigration Reform has recommended a national worker verification system to prevent the employment of illegal aliens. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is planning pilot studies to develop such a system, test its feasibility, and assess its impact in areas such as discrimination.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What questions does INS believe the pilot studies are intended to answer? (2) What additional questions, if any, does the House Subcommittee believe the studies should answer? (3) Are the evaluation designs INS has developed for the pilot studies sufficient for answering these questions?

TITLE: USE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION IN IMPLEMENTING GPRA (973806)

BACKGROUND : The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) requires federal agencies to establish performance goals and indicators for their programs, and encourages them to incorporate program evaluations into that process. This job, which complements GGD's ongoing work, aims to examine pilot GPRA efforts as part of our Title VII mandate to help improve agency evaluations.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1. How are agencies using evaluations and evaluation offices to establish strategic plans, objectives and performance indicators? 2. How can program evaluation methods be used to meet challenges to measuring program performance (such as reconciling multiple purposes and estimating program impacts) and thus improve the analysis and interpretation of this data?

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OTHER ISSUE AREA WORK

TITLE: ADJUSTING FOR MISSING DATA AND POPULATION REPRESENTATION ERRORS (973850)

BACKGROUND : Missing data and population representation errors compromise our findings and limit our ability to use many available data sources. The use of a generally accepted methodology for dealing with these problems will strengthen our reporting and reduce the time cost of data collection and increase the opportunities to use other data sources such as extant data.

KEY QUESTIONS : Can the GAO standardize the methods generally accepted by the scientific community for dealing with missing data and population representation errors and package them in a format suitable for implementation by both GAO evaluators and technical assistance specialists?


