PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

NIH Clinical Center, Rehabilitation Medicine Department
Project Title: Analyzing the SSA Disability Evaluation Process (Z01 CL060065-01)
Developed by: Jerry King and Elizabeth Rasch

January 2009
UPDATE

I. Background.

The Clinical Center Rehabilitation Medicine Department (CC-RMD) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has agreed to assist the Social Security Administration (SSA) to explore innovative methods for augmenting and improving the current disability evaluation process. Historically, SSA has attempted to provide adjudicators with screening tools designed to expedite claim allowances. One such screening tool is the Listing of Impairments (Listings), which identifies categories of medical diagnoses by group. However, evidence suggests that, over time, the diagnostic basis for the Listings has become less useful as a marker of disability. Data from the SSA indicate that early use of the Listings accounted for more than 90% of allowances. However, by 2004, the Listings accounted for only 52% of the allowances. SSA wants to understand how the current functional requirements in the Listings may be more effectively used to screen likely allowances sooner. It is in this context that the SSA sought help from the NIH-CC-RMD to examine existing SSA data to improve screening processes and to explore innovative methods for augmenting the existing disability evaluation process. Thus, this project includes two major lines of research: 1) analysis of existing SSA data, and 2) assessing the feasibility of developing Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) instruments that can be integrated into the SSA data collection and determination processes. NIH-CC-RMD investigators will take the lead on data analysis, while external collaborators will be leading CAT tool development.

The first major line of work requires analysis of data from longitudinal research files maintained by the Social Security Administration's Office of Disability Program Information and Studies (ODPIS). These files house extensive administrative data, including application data, earnings data and decisional data. Each record represents one disability claim. Past efforts to improve the quality and utility of the files were challenged by resource constraints. Users of the data files will need to creatively problem-solve and formulate solutions to data-related issues as they arise.

II. Key Personnel.

    A. Rehabilitation Medicine Department
            1.   Leighton Chan, M.D.
                  Chief, Rehabilitation Medicine Department
                  Project Leader
            2.   Elizabeth Rasch, PT, Ph.D.
                  Staff Scientist
            3.   Lula Russell

Project Officer
4. Ching Yi Shieh, Ph.D.
Statistician / Data Analyst
5. Diane Brandt, PT, MS
Protocol Manager
6. Contract Scientists
(To be named)

B. Social Security Administration
1. Glenn Sklar
Associate Commissioner, Office of Disability Programs
2. Nancy Schoenberg
Project Officer
3. Susan David
Office Director, Disability Program Management Information
4. Steve Duffy
Office of Disability Programs
5. Fran Huber
Presidential Management Fellow
Social Security Administration, Office of Disability Programs

C. Clinical Center
1. Dr. Jon W. McKeeby
Chief Information Officer
2. Jerry P. King
Privacy Officer
3. John Franco
Information Systems Security Officer
4. Julius Tidwell
Contract Officer
5. John Kocher
Section Chief, Operations and Data Center, DCRI
6. Barrett Grieb
Systems Administrator, DCRI

D. SAS
1. Chris Lieberman
Account Executive
SAS HHS Government Operations
2. Pat Alcorn
Senior Systems Engineer
SAS Institute
3. Paul Billy
Project Manager
SAS Global Professional Services and Delivery
4. Patti Southard Project Manager

SAS Global Professional Services and Delivery
5.   Steven Sober
        System Engineer Manager
        SAS Global Sales Development and Product Management