



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Veterans Health Administration**  
**Washington DC 20420**

**IL 12-2005-004**

In Reply Refer To: 122

**October 25, 2005**

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION LETTER**

**SOLICITATION OF APPLICATIONS FOR  
CHRONIC PAIN TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT**

*NOTE: This rescinds IL 12-2005-002, dated July 26, 2005, due to date change in subparagraph 11a.*

1. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Research and Development (ORD) Information Letter announces the opportunity for investigators from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers to compete for research funding for studies focusing on chronic pain as a secondary condition associated with primary impairments of spinal cord injury, burn injury, amputation, traumatic brain injury, blast and crush injury, multiple sclerosis, cancer, and other disorders. Often chronic pain as a secondary condition becomes a persisting, debilitating, and disabling problem in this population, and therefore, is an important issue for VHA.
2. An important goal of the Chronic Medical Disease portfolio of the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) is to document and define the impact of traditional rehabilitation modalities for the treatment and management of chronic pain, while fostering the development of novel therapies in order to improve rehabilitative outcomes of veterans. An array of basic as well as clinical studies are needed in order to change existing paradigms concerning chronic pain assessment, management, and treatment, especially as it pertains to pain as a secondary condition associated with various diseases, injuries, and disorders. Understanding chronic pain is necessary in order to achieve clinical efficacy, improve functional independence, recovery and overall quality of life of veterans. *NOTE: This solicitation is in accordance with Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7303.*
3. Chronic pain is a complex, critical health problem affecting more than 50 million Americans a year and is a secondary condition associated with various disorders and diseases that cause muscle strain and inflammation, circulatory difficulties, systemic problems, trauma to nerves, or Central Nervous System (CNS) dysfunction. Moreover, it is a subjective experience, perhaps due to an array of factors that potentially influence pain responses such as: genetic differences, immune function, neural activity, age, gender, cognitive capacity, psychological state, and stress. In order to unravel the enigma of chronic pain so that novel therapeutic interventions can be developed to assess, manage, and prevent chronic pain, basic and clinical research endeavors are needed.

4. RR&D is committed to salient research endeavors that aim to examine various rehabilitative treatment modalities and strategies that employ conventional and innovative techniques, over a wide-range of parameters, including physical, psychological, and social, all aimed at restoring function and improving overall quality of life for veterans that suffer from chronic pain associated with primary impairments. RR&D solicits studies to:

- a. Define and characterize chronic pain,
- b. Develop novel approaches to prevent the development of chronic disability,
- c. Ameliorate the effects of chronic pain, and
- d. Develop novel chronic pain treatment programs that promote patient compliance and successful life-strategies.

5. Given the ongoing conflicts of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the nature of warfare and battlefield medicine presents new challenges for VA's health care delivery system. Previously unsurvivable injuries are now survivable resulting in a new generation of war wounded veterans with complex, multiple injuries and possible long-term disability. Clinicians and researchers are now finding that at the forefront of these battlefield impairments and disabilities (e.g., limb loss, burn injury, traumatic brain injury, and crush and blast injury) is associated chronic pain. Research studies that establish collaborative efforts with the Department of Defense (DOD) in order to effectively assess, manage, and treat chronic pain with respect to physical, social, and psychological issues in response to this solicitation will serve to bolster a seamless transition in the development of clinical rehabilitative interventions between DOD and VHA, and are, therefore, are highly encouraged. Applications submitted need to have direct relevance to improving rehabilitative prognosis, refining rehabilitative therapy, or defining novel areas for therapeutic investigation.

6. This Information Letter solicits studies to develop novel physiological or biological, social, and psychological approaches for the assessment, treatment, and management of chronic pain as a secondary condition associated with primary impairments of spinal cord injury, burn injury, amputation, traumatic brain injury, blast and crush injury, multiple sclerosis, cancer, and other disorders. Investigators such as neurosurgeons, neurologists, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, anesthesiologists, physiatrists, orthopedic surgeons, physical and occupational therapists, internists, and primary care physicians who challenge existing paradigms by incorporating innovative rehabilitative chronic pain research are encouraged to apply. Examples of priority chronic pain treatment research areas include, but are not restricted to:

- a. Examining various chronic pain treatment modalities:

(1) Conventional pharmacological treatment modalities (e.g., opioid analgesics, antidepressants, Nonsteroidal Antiinflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs), and muscle relaxants);

(2) Interventional or invasive treatment modalities such as surgery and nerve blocks;

(3) Complimentary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies such as Yoga, Virtual Reality, spinal manipulations, acupuncture, and Functional Electrical Stimulation (FES);

(4) Behavioral modalities such as cognitive behavioral therapy, hypnosis, exercise, ultrasound, biofeedback, and exercise; and

(5) Multidisciplinary pain management programs.

b. Elucidating the neural basis of pain perception.

c. Examining the relationship between chronic pain and the following:

(1) Sleep deprivation;

(2) Depression, anxiety, and guilt;

(3) Loss of employment;

(4) Suicidal ideation;

(5) Memory and cognitive impairment;

(6) Substance abuse (drug and alcohol); and

(7) Compensation and pension claims.

d. Developing and utilizing current animal models of chronic pain.

e. Examining chronic pain assessment, treatment, and management in special rehabilitative populations of cognitively impaired, ethnic groups, and the elderly.

f. Developing reliable and valid measures for pain assessment, and predicting co-morbidities conditions such as depression, and substance abuse.

g. Identifying barriers (e.g., emotional, social, and physical) to reintegrating into military service or civilian life.

9. Successful clinical proposals most responsive to this solicitation will incorporate a multi-disciplinary approach to the assessment, management, and treatment of chronic pain. In addition, pre-clinical and clinical research proposals are reviewed for scientific merit, relevance to the veteran population, capability of applicant to meet intended outcome of proposed research program, and potential contribution of proposed research to the field of rehabilitation and ultimately, quality of life to veterans. Criteria for review and evaluation are:

- a. Relevance to veteran population,
- b. Relevance of stated hypothesis to the mission of RR&D,
- c. Relationship of stated hypothesis to proposed research activities and/or methodologies,
- d. Potential of proposed research plan to produce new and beneficial information with the expectation for therapeutic intervention and exponential increase in research findings,
- e. Incorporation of expertise required to carry out all facets of the proposed research plan,
- f. Contribution to overall VA RR&D portfolio,
- g. Appropriateness and statistical significance of VA patient pool,
- h. Adequacy of VA facilities and equipment,
- i. Ability of budget to cover all reasonable costs related to the proposal, and
- j. Appropriateness and detail of subcontract (if required).

10. Funding of proposals is contingent upon the availability of funds.

11. Important Due Dates:

- |                                   |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| a. Letters of Intent:             | November 9, 2005  |
| b. Proposals due at RR&D Service: | December 15, 2005 |
| c. Review:                        | February, 2006    |
| d. Projected funding date:        | June, 2006        |

12. Applications and instructions for the RR&D standard review process are available on the RR&D website at <http://www.vard.org>. Direct questions about scientific and/or research issues to:

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Attachment

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## ATTACHMENT A

### REQUIREMENTS

1. Proposals must incorporate proven techniques for adequate analysis and dissemination of results in leading peer-reviewed journals; therefore, proposals must:
  - a. Use adequate subject pools,
  - b. Incorporate rigorous statistical analyses, and
  - c. Clearly define outcomes.
2. Applications submitted must have direct relevance to improving rehabilitative prognosis, refining rehabilitative therapy, or defining novel areas for therapeutic investigation.
3. Although preliminary data in support of the studies is not required, a demonstration of previous research, sound rationale, and appropriate expertise is expected.
4. All applicants (i.e., the Principal Investigator (PI) and any Co-PIs) for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) research funds must hold at least a 5/8th salaried VA appointment before a research project can be funded.
5. All applicants must submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) by October 15, 2005. LOIs must be directed through the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research and Development (R&D) and include:
  - a. Names of key investigators (PI, Co-PI, Co-Investigators),
  - b. Brief background,
  - c. Clearly stated hypothesis,
  - d. Outline of Methods,
  - e. Estimated Budget, and
  - f. Appropriate references.
6. This Request for Proposals will use Program Funding (822). The applicant must be solely responsible for planning, directing, and executing the proposed project. The applicant may request up to \$250, 000 per year for 3 years.