

March 19, 2002

REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTIVE

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive announces programmatic changes in the Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Service.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This Directive establishes new policy and procedures for the VHA RR&D program.
- 3. RELATED DOCUMENTS:** VHA Directive 1200, VHA handbook 1200.1, and VHA Handbook 1200.2.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of RR&D is responsible for the contents of this Directive.
- 5. RESCISSION:** VA Manual M-3, Part III, dated November 12, 1985, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION;** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of March 2007.

Frances M. Murphy, M.D., M.P.H.
Acting Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 3/21/2002
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 3/21/2002

**VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive provides policy and guidance for programs of the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), and serves as a guide to additional sources for program-specific information and procedures. **NOTE:** *RR&D program documents are updated as necessary, and are available electronically, at www.vard.org.*

2. BACKGROUND

a. RR&D in VHA is an intramural program administered by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) and conducted at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities nationwide (see VHA Directive 1200).

b. RR&D's mission is to discover new knowledge to advance optimal rehabilitative health care for veterans with disabilities, and to create innovations that improve the health and rehabilitative care of veterans and the Nation. In support of this mission, RR&D strives to:

(1) Sustain a superior environment of inquiry conducive to the highest quality research, education and patient care.

(2) Integrate effectively pre-clinical, clinical, and applied research to meet the rehabilitative health care needs of veterans.

(3) Effectively transfer research results into practice in order to advance the rehabilitative health care of veterans.

(4) Capitalize on VHA's value as a national research asset.

(5) Lead and manage an effective and efficient rehabilitation research enterprise.

(6) Increase awareness and understanding of VHA's research contributions in the field of rehabilitation.

c. Values guiding all RR&D efforts include: scientific excellence; the ethical conduct of research; protection of human subjects; and animal welfare. The RR&D program spans the continuum from pre-clinical research through the translation of research into health care practice, emphasizing the health concerns of veterans.

d. Unlike agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Defense, VA does not have the statutory authority to make research grants to colleges and universities, cities and states, or any other non-VA entities. Contracts may be utilized to obtain special services not available in VA (see VHA Handbook 1200.2).

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that ORD allocate appropriated research funds to VA medical facilities for scientifically meritorious research related to the high priority health care needs of veterans to be conducted by VA employees.

4. ACTION

a. VA investigators may obtain funding support for their research from extramural sources, such as: other Federal agencies, private voluntary health organizations and foundations, as well as commercial entities.

b. Letters of Intent (LOI) or research proposals received by RR&D Service that are determined to be more appropriate for review by another Research and Development (R&D) Service may be transferred to that R&D Service to ensure adequate peer review. The R&D Service accepting review responsibility must notify the applicant. The LOI or proposal must be reviewed in accordance with procedures applicable to the reviewing Service.

NOTE: The requirements of any policies and operational procedures formulated in conjunction with this VHA Directive apply to all RR&D activities conducted at VA facilities and/or by VA investigators, whether funded by VA or by other sources, or unfunded.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **VA Central Office.** The Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO) is responsible for the overall policy, planning, coordination, and direction of R&D activities within VHA (see VHA Directive 1200). The Director, RR&D is responsible to the CRADO for developing, administering, and coordinating a rehabilitation research program that provides new knowledge to advance optimal rehabilitation health care for veterans. Areas of emphasis include: prosthetics, orthotics, mobility, orthopedics, disabilities as a consequence of aging, neurological dysfunction, spinal cord injury restoration and/or rehabilitation, visual and hearing impairment, chronic psychiatric disorders, rehabilitation outcomes, and engineering applications to rehabilitation.

b. **VA Medical Centers.** Refer to VHA Handbook 1200.1 for a description of the responsibilities of facility directors, the R&D Committee, and the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for R&D or Coordinator for R&D (C for R&D), Administrative Officer (AO) for R&D, and the Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) in relation to the research program at their facilities.

6. DEFINITIONS

a. **Merit Review Program.** The RR&D Investigator Initiated Research (IIR) Merit Review Program is the principal mechanism for competitive funding of VA rehabilitation research. A Scientific Review and Evaluation Board reviews all IIR proposals for merit. Upon completion of this process, the Director of RR&D recommends funding projects based upon the scientific merit and feasibility of the proposed research, and the significance and relevance of the research to the RR&D mission. *NOTE: See VHA Handbook 1203.1, for policy and guidance regarding the RR&D Merit Review Program and instructions for proposal submission.*

b. **Career Development Program.** The fundamental objective of the RR&D Research Career Development (RCD) Program is to build capacity for VA to conduct research in areas of high relevance to the veterans health care system in fulfillment of its primary mission of patient care, supported by appropriate research and education. There are three separate levels of award in this program:

(1) The RCD Award is a mentored 3-year award for clinicians at the doctoral level with limited or no research experience.

(2) The Advanced Research Career Development (ARCD) Award is a mentored 3-year award for doctoral level clinicians who have had limited research experience.

(3) The Research Career Development Enhancement (RCDE) Award is a 1-year award for more experienced clinician investigators who require research leave from their own laboratory to conduct special experiments at a unique facility, to learn new research techniques, or to develop a new direction of their research program. *NOTE: See VHA Handbook 1203.2, for policy and guidance regarding the RR&D Career Development Program and application instructions.*

c. **Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program.** The RR&D RCS Program is intended to provide recognition and research support for non-clinician scientists in VA. Non-clinician scientists contribute to VA research programs not only because of their direct contributions to scientific knowledge, but because they serve as mentors for clinician and non-clinician investigators. They provide an important expertise that complements the research programs of the clinical staff. The RCS designation consists of two levels:

(1) The RCS Award is a 5-year entry level award for scientists with a well established research track-record.

(2) The Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS) Award is a 7-year award for VA scientists who are recognized internationally as leaders in their field.

NOTE: See VHA Handbook 1203.3, for policy and guidance regarding the RR&D Research Career Scientist Program and application instructions.

d. **RR&D Centers.** RR&D Centers are established in VA health care facilities to conduct R&D in areas of special relevance to the rehabilitative health care needs of veterans. RR&D Centers are intended to be a resource, first, for the veterans served by VA and, second, for the rehabilitation community at large. They are expected to provide cutting edge solutions to the issues of chronic impairment. It is anticipated that Centers will establish and cultivate a community of VA clinical scientists and scholars within the VA health care system for the purpose of pursuing specific research objectives in accordance with a well-reasoned 5-year plan. *NOTE: Centers are funded up to 5 years with an opportunity to re-compete for continued funding.* Centers are to develop an integrated thematic research core as a unifying focus of research activities. The Centers must be responsive to agency-wide needs, but remain the responsibility of the health care facility Director with the usual relationship to the R&D Committee and the ACOS for R&D. *NOTE: See VHA Handbook 1203.4, for policy and procedural guidance regarding the RR&D Centers Program.*

e. **The Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development (JRRD)**. JRRD, a peer-reviewed publication of VA RR&D Service, is the only indexed, scientific journal offering comprehensive coverage of all rehabilitation research disciplines: neurological, orthopedic, engineering, auditory, ophthalmological and optometric, outcomes, restorative, geriatric, psychiatric, and community reintegration. JRRD accepts papers from both VA and non-VA investigators, and its editors frequently receive manuscripts from international sources (see VHA Handbook 1203.5, for policy and procedural guidance with reference to JRRD, including instructions to contributors).

f. **Magnuson Award**. The Paul B. Magnuson Award is presented annually to a VA RR&D investigator who exemplifies the entrepreneurship, humanitarianism, and dedication to veterans displayed by Dr. Magnuson during his career. The Award was established in 1998 in recognition of the importance of rehabilitation research within the VA health care system. It is the highest honor for VA rehabilitation investigators. Nominations need to be submitted to RR&D by February 1; successful candidates are notified by March 15. The award is presented at the following VA RR&D National Meeting (see VHA Handbook 1203.6).