

April 15, 2002

**VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive defines HSR&D policy.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This document clarifies content and incorporates additional information previously contained in VHA Manual M-3, Part III, Chapter 1.
- 3. RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VHA Handbooks 1204.1 through 1204.5.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Health Services Research and Development Service (124) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be referred to (202) 273-8287, or by facsimile at (202) 273-9007.
- 5. RESCISSION:** This VHA Directive rescinds VHA Manual M-3, Part III, dated November 12, 1985.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of April 2007.

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DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 4/16/2002
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 4/16/2002

**VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive provides policy and guidance for Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) Service programs and serves as a guide to additional sources for program-specific information and procedures. **NOTE:** *HSR&D program documents are updated as necessary and are available electronically, at www.va.gov/resdev.*

2. BACKGROUND

a. **Scope of HSR&D-Sponsored Development**. In addition to research, HSR&D also supports certain kinds of scientific “development.” Most of this work focuses on the development of new measures or analytic techniques for use in health services research, or on the refinement, testing, or translation of existing research tools. Selectively, HSR&D also supports the development of certain other products, such as computer software, patient registries, research databases, and educational materials, although all development projects are bound by restrictions on the use of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) research funds for clinical equipment. All development work sponsored by HSR&D includes a plan for scientific evaluation (see VHA Handbook 1204.1).

b. **Scope of HSR&D-Sponsored Health Services Research**

(1) Health services research is a multidisciplinary field concerned with the effects of social factors, financing systems, organizational structures and processes, technology, and human behavior on health care access, quality, costs, and outcomes. In VA, health services research focuses on understanding how to organize, deliver, and finance health care that is effective and cost effective, in order to meet the needs of veterans and to ensure that their health care system is sound and consistently excellent. It emphasizes research that has practical applications and that can assist patients, health care providers, managers, and policymakers.

(2) HSR&D funding support is primarily for studies about health care services and health care delivery models that are available or feasible in regular clinical settings. The “laboratory” for health services research studies is the real world of clinical practice, where variations among patients, physicians, and other factors that affect health care cannot be fully controlled (and may themselves be the focus of research). **NOTE:** *In general, studies involving treatments that are still regarded as experimental are not in the domain of health services research.*

(3) HSR&D’s research agenda is further shaped by the Designated Research Areas and Designated Research Elements adopted by VA’s Office of Research and Development (ORD) as a conceptual framework for organizing all VA research. Advice regarding appropriate research priorities and emerging issues in health services research is provided by the HSR&D Subcommittee of the National Research Advisory Council and by a joint committee of HSR&D and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) leadership.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that HSR&D's mission is to advance knowledge and promote innovations that improve the health and care of veterans. This mission is carried out through the support of scientifically meritorious and VA-relevant research and development.

4. ACTION: The Director, HSR&D, VHA Central Office is responsible for the overall policy, planning, coordination, and direction of HSR&D activities.

5. DEFINITIONS

a. **Programs Managed By HSR&D.** HSR&D programs are initiated and directed by VA Central Office staff and coordinated with VA Research and Development (R&D) offices throughout the system, in accordance with established policies and procedures. HSR&D programs are of three main types: programs that directly support scientific research and development, programs that build health services research capacity within VA, and programs that strengthen VA's health services research infrastructure. In addition, HSR&D manages some R&D-wide programs for ORD and other entities within VA.

(1) HSR&D Programs

(a) **Merit-Reviewed Research.** In HSR&D, direct support for scientific research and development is provided through two main categories of merit-reviewed research, the Investigator-Initiated Research (IIR) program and the Service-Directed Research (SDR) program. Adhering to the same general principles and procedures for scientific merit review, the IIR and SDR programs provide a flexible framework for support of research addressing a very wide range of topics and employing a range of approaches to address important health services research questions. Projects supported through the IIR mechanism include research on VA-relevant topics identified by the investigators or developed in response to one of HSR&D's program announcements highlighting current research priorities. SDR projects are responses to specific research or development needs identified by HSR&D, ORD, or other offices within VHA, to strengthen or complement VA's health services research enterprise.

(b) **Capacity Building.** Recognizing the need to maintain and build a strong pool of investigators, HSR&D makes a significant investment in the operation of programs to build health services research capacity within VA. Largest are the Career Development program and the Research Career Scientist programs, which provide protected research time, respectively, for talented VA clinicians and non-clinicians who are dedicated to health services research. The Associate Investigator program provides opportunities for junior investigators to work on HSR&D research projects under the mentorship of an experienced Principal Investigator (PI). The newest program for HSR&D is the Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP), which targets sites where the presence of a small number (but at least three) funded HSR&D investigators signals potential growth. REAP awards provide infrastructure support, including costs for some personnel, supplies and equipment, and for pilot projects. In addition, the Nursing Research Initiative (NRI) is another capacity-building program managed by HSR&D for all the services within ORD.

(c) **Centers and Conferences.** Two types of HSR&D programs are designed to strengthen health services research in VA by enhancing opportunities for intellectual exchange. First, HSR&D supports several types of research centers located throughout the country. Second,

through support of conferences, including an annual national research conference and occasional special-purpose conferences, HSR&D facilitates communication, collaboration, and rapid dissemination of research findings.

1. HSR&D's Centers of Excellence (CoE) are large, multidisciplinary teams of investigators with the intellectual resources and logistical support to develop and pursue long-term programs of research and to nurture young investigators. Awarded and renewed based on competitive, merit-review, each of HSR&D's CoEs has unique strengths and research foci. CoE staff constitutes a strong national pool of clinician- and non-clinician researchers, available both as potential collaborators or consultants to other researchers in VA and throughout the health services research community, and as advisers to HSR&D Central Office.

2. HSR&D's Resource Centers provide technical assistance and consultation services to VA researchers and others in Central Office and the field. Each of these Centers (three in fiscal year (FY) 2001) fills a specific need. Current Resource Centers strengthen VA health services research through their expertise and activities in organizational and management issues, the use of VA databases in research, and economic analysis. HSR&D's extensive research dissemination program is also managed at one of these Centers. *NOTE: Core support from HSR&D helps to stabilize and nurture the expertise based at these Centers.*

3. A third set of HSR&D Centers supports work of the Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QuERI). The QuERI Coordinating Centers are responsible for the implementation, program coordination, and ongoing management of all phases of QuERI work.

4. HSR&D's 2-day national scientific meeting, held every year since 1983, is an important forum for exchange of health services research information, and is attended by VA managers and policymakers as well as VA and non-VA researchers. In conjunction with this conference, HSR&D sponsors a day-long meeting for its Career Development and Research Career Scientist awardees. *NOTE: In addition to these annual opportunities for presentation and dissemination of HSR&D-sponsored research, HSR&D may decide to sponsor or co-sponsor selected other conferences or workshops that address current priorities.*

(2) Programs Managed by HSR&D for VHA

(a) QuERI. QuERI is a systematic, national effort to translate research findings into improved patient outcomes and system improvements. Led and managed by HSR&D, QuERI relies on the collaboration of various divisions within VHA Central Office and between Central Office and field operations. HSR&D's key QuERI partners include the Offices of Quality and Performance and Patient Care Services. QuERI activity is organized around a set of clinical conditions; for each clinical area, QuERI promotes a systematic approach for identifying best practices, systematizing their use, and providing feedback to promote ongoing improvement and sustain positive change. *NOTE: HSR&D supports QuERI researchers through its established programs, especially IIR and SDR support for individual research projects, and support of the QuERI infrastructure.*

(b) Nursing Research Initiative (NRI). Designed to encourage research pertaining to nursing topics and to expand the pool of nurse investigators within VA, NRI is a ORD program, implemented in collaboration with VA's Nursing Strategic Healthcare Group (SHG), and

managed by HSR&D. Through NRI, new nurse investigators work with experienced investigators or preceptors. NRI supports research pertinent to the mission of each of three services within ORD (i.e., HSR&D, Medical Research Service (MRS), or Rehabilitation Research & Development (RR&D)). **NOTE:** *Funded projects cover a wide range of important topics for VA patients, with particular emphasis on patient-centered care.*

b. The following VHA Handbooks address policies and programs that are unique in HSR&D as well as HSR&D programs that are implemented differently than their counterparts in other parts of ORD.

(1) **Support for Scientific Research and Development Projects -- Investigator – Initiated Research Program (IIR), Service-Directed Research Program (SDR), and Nursing Research Initiative (NRI) (VHA Handbook 1204.1).** IIR is HSR&D’s mechanism for supporting projects designed by independent VA investigators. SDR is the mechanism for supporting projects that respond to special needs identified by HSR&D, ORD, or VHA leadership. NRI is a mentored research program for VA nurse investigators, managed by HSR&D for ORD. A handbook entitled, “Overview of Support for Scientific Research and Development Projects,” and its appendices present information related to submitting a Letter of Intent, full research proposal, and scientific (“merit”) review. **NOTE:** *Except as specifically indicated, VHA Handbook 1204.1, and VHA Handbook 1204.5, apply to all IIR (including IIR supported through QuERI), NRI, and SDR projects.*

(2) **Capacity-Building Programs (VHA Handbook 1204.2).** Four distinct programs to increase the number and diversity of VA investigators, by providing support for protected time for research and/or mentoring. Handbook entitled “Overview of Capacity-Building for Health Services Research” and its appendices describe HSR&D’s Career Development, Research Career Scientist, Associate Investigator, and Research Enhancement Award programs.

(3) **Centers and Conferences (VHA Handbook 1204.3).** Programs designed to help ensure the continuing vitality of health services research in VA by providing stable support for certain ongoing needs, and by promoting active information exchange. VHA Handbook 1204.3 describes three types of HSR&D Centers (CoEs, Resource Centers, QUERI Coordinating Centers), and HSR&D conference support.

(4) **Under Secretary’s Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Services Research (VHA Handbook 1204.4).** HSR&D’s highest honor, awarded annually to an investigator who exemplifies the highest achievement as researcher, mentor, and role model is described in VHA Handbook 1204.4.

(5) **Operational Guidelines (VHA Handbook 1204.5).** In addition to the operational guidelines that apply to all ORD activities, specific requirements applicable to HSR&D-sponsored activities are contained in VHA Handbook 1204.5.