

HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH CENTERS AND CONFERENCES

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook defines procedures that apply to Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D) programs that are designed to strengthen health services research in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by enhancing opportunities for intellectual exchange.

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES: The principal changes include:

a. Clarifying and incorporating current information specific to HSR&D support of HSR&D Centers of Excellence, Resource Centers, and Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) Coordinating Centers.

b. Explaining policy on HSR&D sponsorship of conferences.

3. RELATED DIRECTIVES: VHA Directive 1204, dated August 7, 2001.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Health Services Research and Development Service (124) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook.

5. RESCISSION: VHA Manual M-3, Part III, Chapter 3, Section 3.02, dated November 12, 1985, is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of April 2007.

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HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH CENTERS AND CONFERENCES

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook defines the procedures that apply to programs of the Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D) which are designed to strengthen health services research in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by enhancing opportunities for intellectual exchange. These opportunities consist of large program support for several types of research centers; and smaller program support for selected health services research conferences. **NOTE:** *While the individual centers and the individual conferences have specific and varied objectives, all contribute to the Office of Research and Development (ORD) goal of sustaining a strong program of health services research.*

2. RESEARCH CENTERS

HSR&D supports three types of research centers: Centers of Excellence (CoEs), Resource Centers, and Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) Coordinating Centers.

a. **Health Services Research CoEs.** HSR&D's CoE program enables multidisciplinary teams of investigators to assemble the intellectual resources and practical tools to pursue long-term agendas in health services research, and to nurture young investigators. HSR&D centers provide relatively stable core funding, enabling a critical mass of investigators to leverage that support and develop long-term programs of research. **NOTE:** *Each of the individual CoEs has unique strengths and a particular research focus.*

(1) The CoE's 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) Each CoE is selected competitively, based on merit review and the specific criteria and procedures outlined in the solicitation for proposals.

(3) Funding is provided for a set period (usually 5 years), with renewal contingent upon productivity, continued promise, and the availability of funds.

(4) CoE Leadership (either the Director or Associate Director) is a physician whose salary support is contributed to by the VA medical facility. All CoE leaders are expected to devote at least half time (.5 Full-time Equivalent (FTE)) effort to CoE activities.

(5) Center leaders and most investigators are expected to meet eligibility criteria for VA research support.

b. Resource Centers

(1) HSR&D's Resource Centers provide technical assistance and consultation services to VA researchers, others in VA Central Office, and the field. Each of these Centers fills a specific need. For example, 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. **NOTE:** *Core support from HSR&D helps to stabilize and nurture the expertise based at these Centers.*

(2) Resource Centers are selected competitively, based on merit review and criteria and procedures outlined in a specific, time-limited solicitation. Funding is provided for a set period (usually 3 years), with renewal contingent upon productivity, continued promise, and availability of funds.

(3) Center leaders and most investigators are expected to meet eligibility criteria for VA research support.

c. QUERI Coordinating Centers. QUERI is a national initiative designed to translate research findings into optimal patient outcomes and system-wide improvements.

(1) Organized around a set of clinical conditions that are major problems in VA, QUERI uses a six-step process to link research and quality improvement. The QUERI steps provide the structure for identifying best practices, promoting their use, measuring the impact of translation activities on patient outcomes, and providing feedback to promote continuous quality improvement to the organization as a whole. **NOTE:** *Conditions that are the foci of QUERI work include, but are not limited to: Congestive Heart Failure, Diabetes, Ischemic Heart Disease, Human Immune Virus (HIV) and/or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), Spinal Cord Injury, Stroke, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse.*

(2) For each QUERI condition, daily activities managed at a QUERI Coordinating Center are led by a Research Coordinator and a Clinical Coordinator. Each group also has an Executive Committee, comprised of approximately 15 clinicians and researchers. Working closely with their respective Executive Committee, the Coordinators use core funds, plus additional funding received through merit review competition, to direct and carry out activities that meet the goals described in their annual strategic and translation plans.

3. PROPOSALS

Periodically, though not on any fixed schedule, HSR&D may announce the opportunity for VA investigators to submit proposals to establish additional centers of an existing type or a new type of HSR&D center. Each center award is to a specified core group of investigators, with a unified, long-term plan that meets HSR&D objectives. Most centers have a strong academic affiliation and may also have formal affiliations with one or more VA facility(ies) in another location. Centers are initially awarded, and their continuation is contingent upon competitive, merit review. Initial funding is usually for a period of 3 to 5 years, with the possibility of one or more renewal(s).

4. HSR&D-SPONSORED CONFERENCES

a. HSR&D-sponsored conferences facilitate communication, collaboration, and rapid dissemination of research findings. HSR&D's major conference activity is its national scientific meeting, open to all VA investigators as well as health services researchers from outside VA. In conjunction with this conference, HSR&D sponsors a national meeting for its Career Development Awardees, Research Career Awardees, and Research Career Scientist awardees. **NOTE:** *For both meetings, VA investigators are invited to submit abstracts, and a committee selects those to be presented.*

b. To facilitate attendance, HSR&D pays expenses for all individuals with current Career Development or Research Career Scientist awards to attend the Career Development and Research Career Scientist meeting, and for those individuals selected to present their research at the National Scientific Meeting. **NOTE:** *Responsibility for selecting a conference theme and planning scientific sessions rotates among HSR&D's COEs.*

c. Centers and investigators are expected to use existing forums (e.g., HSR&D's national scientific meeting, HSR&D "state-of-the-art" conferences, conferences sponsored by other Federal agencies and organizations, e-mail groups, etc.) to exchange scientific information.

d. In select cases, consideration is given to requests for limited HSR&D support of conferences on topics of importance to VA, ORD, and HSR&D. To be eligible for this consideration, the proposed conference is expected to:

(1) Have wide applicability and import throughout the VA system and/or the health services research community; in-kind or financial co-sponsorship; and a significant product or result.

(2) Acknowledge VHA and HSR&D as the sponsor (or co-sponsor).

(3) Submit a request for conference support by an eligible VA investigator, through formal channels, to the Director, HSR&D (attention: 124G). Each request must contain clear and comprehensive information regarding the conference goals, agenda, audience, and logistics, with sufficient detail to permit critical review.

e. HSR&D may initiate and/or sponsor conferences or meetings to meet both HSR&D and ORD strategic planning goals,