

MEDICAL RESEARCH SCIENTIST PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook clarifies policy and establishes procedures for the Medical Research Service (MRS) Medical Research Scientist Program.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** The major changes are:
 - a. A mid-term report is now required for Research Career Scientists (RCS) and Senior Research Career Scientists (SRCS) (see Par. 11, and App. C).
 - b. Specific format for RCS and/or SRCS application and Curriculum Vitae (see App. A and App. B).
- 3. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VHA Directive 1202, to be issued.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The VHA Office of Research and Development, Medical Research Service (121) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook.
- 5. RESCISSION:** This VHA Handbook rescinds VHA Notice 98-02 dated April 27, 1998.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of April 2008.

Robert H. Roswell, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 5/23/2003
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 5/23/2003

CONTENTS

MEDICAL RESEARCH SCIENTIST PROGRAM

PARAGRAPH	PAGE
1. Purpose	1
2. Background	1
3. Scope	1
4. Assistant Research Scientist	2
5. Research Scientist	2
6. Research Career Scientist (RCS)	2
7. Senior Research Career Scientist (SCRS)	3
8. Salary	3
9. Eligibility	3
10. Evaluation	4
11. Maintaining the RCS and SRCS Appointment	5
12. Applications	5
APPENDIXES	
A Instructions for Format, Preparation, and Submissions of Applications for Research Career Scientist Designation	A-1
B Format for Curriculum Vitae for Medical Research Career Scientist	B-1
C Instructions For Medical Research Career Scientist Mid-Term Report	C-1

**MEDICAL RESEARCH SERVICE
MEDICAL RESEARCH SCIENTIST PROGRAM**

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides procedures and guidelines related to Medical Research Service (MRS) Scientist Program and instructions for applying for the designation of Research Career Scientist.

2. BACKGROUND

MRS recognizes the important contributions of non-clinician Ph.D. scientists to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) research program. As principal investigators of MRS research programs, they make valuable contributions to the knowledge of disorders important to the United States veteran population. In addition to research efforts, however, the intramural nature of the VA research program requires that principal investigators have a primary professional commitment to VA. Scientists show this commitment by appropriately acknowledging VA employment and support, participating in committee work, teaching, mentoring, supervising shared resources, and other important research-related activities. In recognition of the contributions and professional commitment to VA, MRS supports a career track for the non-clinician Ph.D. scientist paid by the research appropriation. This Handbook describes the MRS non-clinician scientist career track, hereafter called the Medical Research Scientist Program.

3. SCOPE

a. There are four designated levels to the Medical Research Scientist Program:

- (1) Assistant Research Scientist;
- (2) Research Scientist;
- (3) Research Career Scientist (RCS); and
- (4) Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS).

b. The designations of Assistant Research Scientist and Research Scientist are conferred to non-clinician principal investigators upon funding of their VA Merit Review Entry Program (MREP) and Merit Review Award Program (MERIT) respectively.

c. The designations of RCS and SRCS are conferred to non-clinician scientists by appointment in recognition of outstanding achievements and contributions to VA research. The appointment provides salary support from MRS for the term of the award: 5 years for RCS; 7 years for SRCS and are indefinitely renewable.

4. ASSISTANT RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Recently trained non-clinician scientists seeking an independent research career in VA may apply for the mentored, MREP. Salary support must be requested in the budget per MREP instructions. Upon funding of a MREP, the Assistant Research Scientist whose designation is conferred for the period of the program and is not renewable. Salary support may be extended for up to 6 months following termination of entry-level support, provided the Assistant Research Scientist continues to apply for the MRS MERIT funding and provides service to VA. **NOTE:** *An additional 6 months of support may be requested from Director, MRS.*

5. RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Independent non-clinician Ph.D. scientists may apply to the MERIT Program for research and salary support, once they have received permission to submit a MERIT proposal (see <http://www.va.gov/resdev/directive.mrs.cfm>). Salary support must be requested in the budget per MERIT instructions. The Research Scientist designation is conferred on the principal investigator of a funded MERIT for the term of the program and continues as long as the scientist receives VA peer-reviewed research support. Salary support may be extended for up to 1 year following termination of MRS research support, provided the Research Scientist continues to apply for MERIT funding and provide service to VA research.

6. RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST (RCS)

a. This RCS designation is awarded to established, independent investigators who have distinguished themselves through scientific achievement and contribution to the VA research program via

- (1) Training;
- (2) Mentoring junior VA scientists (clinician and non-clinician);
- (3) Functioning as a resource for the research community;
- (4) Serving on VA research or other local and/or national committees;
- (5) Directing a core facility; and
- (6) Collaborating with clinician scientists.

b. It is expected that RCS applicants have the qualifications to be eligible for a General Schedule (GS)-14 appointment within the Federal government, and the title of Associate Professor at the affiliated university. The RCS Evaluation Committee reviews the RCS applications.

c. RCS appointments provide 5 years of salary support and are renewable indefinitely (see par. 11).

- d. Renewal is competitive and contingent upon availability of funds and continuation of:
- (1) Peer-reviewed research support
 - (2) Contribution to VA research service, and
 - (3) Scientific distinction.

7. SENIOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST (SRCS)

a. At the time of RCS renewal, each RCS is evaluated for the SRCS appointment by the RCS Evaluation Committee. The SRCS appointment is made only by nomination from the RCS Evaluation Committee to the Director, MRS. The highest standards are applied when considering nominations to SRCS. Scientists nominated for SRCS are highly productive, international leaders in their field who have achieved wide recognition of their accomplishments. At the same time, their contributions to the local and national VA programs through training and research service are exemplary.

b. It is expected that SRCS applicants have the qualifications to be eligible for a GS-15 appointment within the Federal government and the title of Professor at the affiliated university. Scientists selected for the SRCS appointment must have previously held a RCS appointment for a minimum period of 5 years.

c. The SRCS level provides 7 years of salary support to the most accomplished VA research scientists (see par. 11). Renewal is competitive and contingent upon availability of funds and continuation of :

- (1) Peer-reviewed research support,
- (2) Contribution to VA research service, and
- (3) Scientific distinction.

8. SALARY

RCS and SRCS receive VA salary support for the term of the appointment and therefore a salary support is not to be requested when applying for VA programs. Assistant Research Scientists and Research Scientists must request salary support on the MREP or MERIT proposal according to the program instructions. VA salary support for the RCS and SRCS will be reduced commensurate with the reduction of research time available, if the investigator holds significant administrative positions at the VA or university affiliate.

9. ELIGIBILITY

An individual VA medical center may submit a total of two (new or revised) RCS applications each fiscal year. A potential applicant needs to consider the source of their VA funding to determine the most appropriate Office of Research and Development (ORD) service (MRS,

Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D), or Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D)) to review the application. Scientists paid by the Medical Care appropriation are not eligible for an RCS appointment, unless they officially terminate their career appointment. The following criteria define the eligibility requirements for a new RCS applicant: *NOTE: Applications will be administratively withdrawn if any of the eligibility criteria have not been met.*

- a. A minimum 5/8th VA-paid appointment at the time of application.
- b. A competitively funded MRS MERIT at the time of application.
- c. An active research program performed in a VA designated laboratory and office for at least the previous 3 years.
- d. National peer-reviewed research support (VA, National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF)) as a principal investigator (not as co-investigator) for at least a total of 6 years. *NOTE: This does not have to be 6 consecutive years.*

10. EVALUATION

Appointment as RCS and SRCS is very selective. The RCS Evaluation Committee reviews new and renewal applications and recommends appointments to Director, MRS. Decisions made by the Director, MRS are not subject to appeal. Evaluations are based on performance of the applicant in the following areas:

- a. **Collaborations.** RCS applicants are evaluated for collaborating with VA and non-VA scientists and clinicians as evidenced by their joint peer-reviewed publications, sharing research techniques and/or special procedures, obtaining grants together, etc.
- b. **Mentoring and Training.** In addition to mentoring and training undergraduate and/or graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and junior VA scientists, RCS applicants are specifically evaluated for their contributions to clinical scientists' efforts in successfully obtaining grants, peer-reviewed publications, sharing special research techniques, etc. Applicants are also evaluated for their participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists; teaching at the affiliated university; and training investigators in special techniques.
- c. **Administrative Service.** Both local and national research administration is evaluated including local VA medical center committee service; service at the affiliated University; and national service such as: ad hoc or regular membership on MERIT subcommittees, NIH study sections, etc. *NOTE: Service to the local VA research program is considered essential.*
- d. **Research.** RCS applicant's contributions to research are evaluated by considering their history of publishing peer-reviewed research papers in high-quality journals; peer-reviewed research funding; funding record as principal investigator; membership on editorial or advisory boards for journals, etc. *NOTE: Publications with clinician scientists are valued.*

e. **Letters of Recommendation.** Letters of recommendation from national and international leaders in the applicant's field are evaluated to determine the applicant's achievements and contributions in research, collaborating, mentoring, training, and service.

11. MAINTAINING THE RCS AND SRCS APPOINTMENT

Maintaining the RCS and/or the SRCS appointment is highly competitive and subject to periodic peer review.

a. At the mid-term of the appointment, the RCS Evaluation Committee reviews progress via a report submitted by the appointee (see App. C). The mid-term report provides information regarding the overall impression of the RCS Evaluation Committee regarding whether the appointment remains competitive. **NOTE:** *MRS will convey any concern of the committee to the RCS and/or SRCS.*

b. The applicant is responsible for submitting a timely renewal. Renewal applications are due in VA Central Office one round prior to the award end date, i.e., September 1, for awards ending on March 31, of the following year and on March 1, for awards ending September 30. At the time of renewal, the RCS and/or SRCS is expected to have maintained a productive, funded, peer-reviewed research program and will be evaluated using the same criteria as a new applicant. **NOTE:** *Renewal applications need to be prepared according to the instructions in Appendix A, with the exception that letters of recommendation are not required.*

c. If an application for appointment renewal is not approved, the applicant may receive salary from their funded MERIT. It is recommended that a non-renewed applicant wait at least 6 months before submitting a new application. **NOTE:** *Non-renewal decisions are not subject to appeal.*

12. APPLICATIONS

New applications are accepted twice each year and must be received in MRS by March 1 or September 1.

- a. Appendix A describes instructions for preparation of new and renewal applications.
- b. Appendix B describes the current format for a MRS Curriculum Vitae (CV).
- c. Appendix C describes preparation instructions for the mid-term report.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR FORMAT, PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF
APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST DESIGNATION**

Medical Research Service (MRS) will accept a total of two (new or revised) applications from an individual Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center during a fiscal year.

1. FORMAT: Use a standard font. The height of the letters must be at least 11 point, the type density must be no more than 15 characters per inch (CPI) and have no more than six lines of type within a vertical inch. For proportional spacing, any representative section of text must not exceed a density of 15 CPI. Proposals should consist of single-spaced typed pages. Use only letter-quality print; do not use a dot matrix printer. Do not use photo reduction or small fonts.

2. PROPOSAL PREPARATION

a. **Cover Page.** A cover page listing the following information in the order specified:

- (1) **Title.** Medical Research Career Scientist Application.
- (2) Name of nominee.
- (3) Name of VA medical center and indication whether this is the first or second nomination from the VA medical center during the current fiscal year (October 1 – September 30).
- (4) Nominee's date of birth.
- (5) Positions currently held and proposed.
- (6) Nominee's current VA-paid appointment (in 8ths).
- (7) Number of years employed by VA as a Ph.D. scientist.
- (8) Nominee's current grade and step.
- (9) Nominee's academic title (indicate tenure status).
- (10) Location of nominee's laboratory and office.
- (11) Current VA-funding including title, inclusive dates, role, and amount.
- (12) Name, title, and signature of the Associate Chief of Staff and the VA medical center Director.

b. **Narrative.** With the information in the specified order:

(1) A statement describing the research area of the nominee and its relevance to VA health care. This statement is page “1” of the application. All pages need to contain both the nominee’s name and page number at the bottom (e.g., Smith-1 – Smith-20).

(2) Statement of nominee’s working relationship with other investigators and interactions at the medical center. Describe briefly, the collaborations with other VA and non-VA scientists and clinicians and indicate if they resulted in co-authored publications and/or joint grant funding.

(3) A current curriculum vitae (CV) (see App. B).

(4) Five letters of support. Each letter needs to provide an opinion regarding the applicant’s reputation as a scientist, evaluation of standing in applicant’s field of research, and capability as a mentor and collaborator. The letters need to be from recognized leaders in the applicant’s research area, including internationally recognized experts. **NOTE: Do not include more than five letters. Additional letters will be disregarded. Do not include letters in renewal applications.**

(5) A letter of support from the Research and Development (R&D) Committee.

(6) For current VA funded research, a completed:

(a) VA Form 10-1313-2, MERIT Application, Summary Description of Program/Project.

(b) VA Form 10-1313-3, MERIT Application, Current Funds and First Year Request for Program/Project.

(c) VA Form 10-1313-4, MERIT Application, Estimated Expenses of Program/Project.

(d) VA Form 10-1313-7, MERIT Application, Investigator’s Total VA and Non-VA Research Support (Current and Pending).

(e) VA Form 10-1313-8, MERIT Application, Investigator’s Total VA and Non-VA Research/Development Support.

(7) For current non-VA funded research, include a budget page and an abstract.

(8) Two publications chosen by the nominee as being representative of the nominee’s work.

3. DUE DATE. Applications are reviewed semi-annually. The deadline for receipt of applications is March 1 and September 1.

4. SUBMISSION. Send original plus ten copies of the complete application by either United States (U.S.) mail or courier service.

a. If mailed through the U.S. Postal Service, send to:

May 22, 2003

VHA HANDBOOK 1202.4
APPENDIX A

Research Career Scientist Nominations
Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Research Service (121E)
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420

b. If courier or commercial overnight delivery service is used, send to:

Research Career Scientist Nominations
Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Research Service (121E)
1400 Eye Street, NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
202-408-3600

**FORMAT FOR CURRICULUM VITAE
FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST**

NOTE: List inclusive dates wherever appropriate.

1. PERSONAL DATA

- a. Name,
- b. Current mailing address,
- c. Telephone and fax numbers, and
- d. Professional Facilities: office and laboratory locations.

2. EDUCATION

- a. Baccalaureate.
- b. Graduate.
- c. Postgraduate.

3. POSTDOCTORAL TRAINING

4. APPOINTMENTS

- a. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appointments (indicate grade and step).
- b. University appointments (indicate tenured status.)
- c. Other professional employment.

5. AFFILIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS. Professional affiliations and membership in scientific societies including any offices held (local, national, and/or international).

6. SERVICE TO LOCAL VA MEDICAL CENTER

7. SERVICE TO NATIONAL VA

8. SERVICE TO AFFILIATED UNIVERSITY

9. SERVICE TO PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. Service to professional organizations including national advisory committees, editorships, peer review activities, etc.

10. PROFESSIONAL AWARDS AND HONORS

11. FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS: List funded research projects (current and past, VA and non-VA) in spreadsheet form with the following information. *NOTE: For renewal applications, limit to the past 10 years.*

Source of Funding Grant Number Title of Project Role Dates Annual Direct Amount

12. TRAINING AND MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

a. List specific teaching assignments, past and current with inclusive dates, at the affiliate and/or at other institutions. Include participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists and training investigators in special techniques.

b. List past and current undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty mentored. Include names, level of trainee, inclusive dates and trainees' current position in the spreadsheet format shown in the following. *NOTE: For renewals, limit this entire section to the past 10 years.*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Trainee Status</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>	<u>VA or non-VA</u>	<u>Clinician or Non-clinician</u>	<u>Current Position</u>
	Undergraduate Graduate or Post-doctoral Other (describe)				

c. Provide evidence of successful mentoring of fellows or junior scientists, VA and non-VA, in terms of their transition to independence, for e.g., obtaining independent research grants and/or advancement in their academic position.

13. EXTRAMURAL ACTIVITIES: Extramural invited presentations and seminars (include dates and limit to the past 10 years).

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY: Numbered bibliography in the following order. *NOTE: For renewal applications, limit listing to the past 10 years.* Highlight nominee's name.

NOTE: Do not include abstracts, papers submitted or in preparation.

- a. Papers published or in press in peer-reviewed journals.
- b. Published invited papers in proceedings or in other non-peer reviewed journals.
- c. Review articles.
- d. Books and book chapters

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST
MID-TERM REPORT**

At the mid-term of Research Career Scientist (RCS) and/or Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS) appointments, a report is due in Medical Research Service (MRS) to be reviewed by the RCS Evaluation Committee. The report consists of a cover page and accompanying documentation. *NOTE: Pay attention to the page limitations.*

1. COVER PAGE. List the following information, in the order specified, on the cover page:

- a. **Title.** Medical Research Career Scientist; Mid-Term Evaluation
- b. **Name of RCS**
- c. **Type of Appointment.** (RCS or SRCS)
- d. **Current Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Employment.** (VA paid 8ths, Grade, and Step)
- e. **Academic Title.** (Indicate tenure status)
- f. **Location of Office**
- g. **Location of Laboratory**
- h. **Date of RCS Appointment**
- i. **Inclusive Dates of Reporting Period**
- j. **Signatures.** (RCS and/or SRCS; Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research; VA medical center Director)

2. DOCUMENTATION. Provide the following information requested for the reporting period only. All publications should include percent of RCS contribution. *NOTE: Do not provide a Curriculum Vitae or historic data of accomplishments prior to the reporting period.*

- a. **Collaboration** (*Limit to one page*)
 - (1) List all publications with established clinicians or other scientists, VA and non-VA.
 - (2) List all funded grants as co-investigator or collaborator with established clinicians or other scientists, VA and non-VA.
- b. **Mentoring** (*Limit to one page*)

(1) List all publications with new scientists, VA and non-VA. A new scientist is one who has not yet received funding from a national peer-reviewed source.

(2) List all funded grants as co-investigator or collaborator with new scientists (VA and non-VA)

(3) List all Career Development Awards and MREP applications on which the applicant serves as mentor, co-mentor, or collaborator.

(4) List any other mentoring activities.

c. **Training.** List specific teaching assignments at the affiliate and/or at other institutions. Include participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists, and training investigators in special techniques. List training activities in the following spreadsheet format:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Trainee Status</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>	<u>VA or non-VA</u>	<u>Clinician or Non-clinician</u>	<u>Current Position</u>
Undergraduate					
Graduate or					
Post-doctoral					
Other (describe)					

d. **Administration.** List both local and national research contributions (committees, review boards, editorial boards, etc.) during the reporting period, and indicate whether service is VA or non-VA related. Limit to one page and include dates of service.

e. **Research Productivity**

(1) List currently funded and pending research projects (VA and non-VA) in the following spreadsheet format for the reporting period only.

<u>Source of Funding</u>	<u>Grant Number</u>	<u>Title of Project</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Annual Direct Amount</u>
--------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------	-------------	--------------	-----------------------------

(2) Present a list of numbered publications in the following order for the reporting period only. Include an indication of the percent of contribution made for each work. **NOTE:** *Do not include abstracts, papers submitted, or in preparation.*

(a) Papers published or in press in peer-reviewed journals. **NOTE:** *Highlight RCS name.*

(b) Published invited papers in proceedings or in other non-peer reviewed journals.

(c) Review articles

(d) Books and book chapters.

f. **Other.** Comment, if necessary, upon any changes that may have affected research productivity and/or service during the reporting period. Limit to a maximum of one page.

3. **DUE DATE.** March 1 or September 1, as appropriate for the mid-term.
4. **SUBMISSION.** Send original report plus four copies by either United States (U.S.) mail or courier service.

- a. If mailed through the U.S. Postal Service, send to:

Research career Scientist Mid-Term Reports
Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Research Service (121E)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20420

- b. If courier or commercial overnight delivery service is used, send to:

Research Career Scientist Mid Term Report
Department of Veterans affairs
Medical Research Service (121E)
1400 Eye Street N.W.
Suite 400
Washington DC 20005
202-408-3600