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CHAPTER 8. CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**8.01 GENERAL**

The Career Development Program is open at all levels to clinicians with doctorate degrees but is not available to non-clinician Ph.D.s. The program supports research training of clinicians seeking careers as clinician-researchers within VA, as well as providing protected research time to established VA clinician-investigators seeking a period of concentrated research activity. Career Development appointees are encouraged to spend part of their time in clinical service; however, appointees should not function as clinical Section Heads, Service Chiefs, or Department Heads during the terms of their Career Development appointments. Implicit in all Career Development applications is the understanding that the applicant foresees a career in VA and, particularly for the more advanced levels, that the medical center has a long-range plan for the applicant's VA career.

a. **All Career Development appointments are full time.** Physicians and dentists must be licensed to practice in a state, territory, or commonwealth of the United States or in the District of Columbia. Clinical psychologists, nurses, audiologists, speech pathologists, and social workers must meet VA qualification standards for their clinical professions.

b. The Career Development Program accepts only U.S. citizens, except at the Associate Investigator and Research Associate levels. Consistent with the provisions of VHS&RA Supplement MP-5, part 11, paragraph 2.04g, immigrant physicians, dentists, and nurses who will be eligible for U.S. citizenship before completion of their appointments qualify for these two levels. Permanent resident aliens (i.e., green card holders) may compete with citizens at the Associate Investigator and Research Associate levels, provided their 5-year waiting period (3 years in the case of resident aliens married to citizens) will be completed during the term of the career development appointment. Aliens without the green card cannot compete with citizens for career development appointments and their applications will be returned, unreviewed.

c. All Career Development applications must first be evaluated by VA medical center R&D Committee and approved by the Deans Committee and the medical center Director. The Career Development Office (151j) receives all Career Development applications. Associate Investigator, Research Associate, and Senior Medical Investigator applications are reviewed by the Career Development Committee. Assignment of applications to the Career Development Committee members is made by the Chief, Career Development Program. Clinical Investigator and Medical Investigator applications are reviewed for their scientific merit by the appropriate Merit Review Boards. Assignment of applications to the Merit Review Boards is made by the Program Review Division. Although reviewed by the Program Review Division, Clinical Investigators and Medical Investigators will be competing for awards only among other Clinical Investigator or Medical Investigator applicants. The Career Development Committee and the Merit Review Boards furnish a second level of peer review.

d. Applicants are encouraged to suggest the names of two or more scientists they believe are qualified to review their proposal. This is especially useful when the research does not fall within the area of expertise of more than one of the members of the Career Development Committee. The potential reviewer's names must show their academic affiliation, complete address, and telephone number. The names of those extramural scientists who reviewed the proposal for VA medical center R&D Committee should also be included.

e. An applicant whose proposal was either disapproved or approved but not funded may resubmit a revised application. The revised application must contain a letter from the applicant, not to exceed three pages and addressed to the Career Development Committee, outlining the revisions and discussing the applicant's response to the reviewers' comments. This letter should follow Item 7, the applicant's future plans and ambitions, and precede Item 9, the research proposal. Applications that do not contain this information will be returned unreviewed. Career Development applications are not subject to the formal appeals process.

f. **Award Extensions.** Starting with the awards given January 1, 1986, Associate Investigator, Research Associate, Clinical Investigator, and Medical Investigator awards may not be extended or renewed. Candidates appointed before 1986 may apply for extensions. A Career Development awardee may be appointed to different levels in the program but never to a second complete term at the same level, except for Senior Medical Investigators.

g. **Award Transfers.** Clinical Investigator, Medical Investigator, and Senior Medical Investigator appointments are not transferable. The Director, Medical Research Service, may approve the transfer of Associate Investigator and Research Associate appointments when the reason for the transfer is to allow the appointee to accompany the preceptor to a new VA medical center. The R&D Committee, Deans Committee, and Director of the new medical center must endorse the transfer and assure the Director, Medical Research Service, that sufficient VA space and support will be available for the successful completion of the transferee's appointment. A Clinical or Medical Investigator appointee who moves to another VA medical center may submit a new Career Development application from the new medical center. If approved and funded, the appointee will then be able to finish the balance of the original appointment at the new VA medical center.

h. **Award Location.** The site for a Career Development awardee's research and clinical activity should be in a VA medical center. However, in keeping with the policy that VA Career Development awards are for the training or augmentation of the research careers of VA clinicians, the Director, Medical Research Service, will consider, on a case-by-case basis, written requests for exceptions. When, because of lack of research laboratory or other resource, the applicant wishes to do the research outside of VA facility, a letter, **separate from the application** and addressed to the Director, Medical Research Service (151j), **must precede** the application. This letter must request and carefully justify the exception. Without an appropriately approved letter of justification, applications of nominees whose research is based outside of VA facilities will be returned unreviewed. There are no exceptions for Medical Investigators and Senior Medical Investigators, who must be based within a VA facility.

i. **Preceptors.** Associate Investigators and Research Associates may have more than one preceptor; however, one of the preceptors must be an eligible VA investigator.

j. **Career Development and Other VA Funding.** The research described in a Career Development application should comprise the investigator's total research effort. With the exception of the Associate Investigator and Senior Investigator awards, additional funding may be obtained through VA Merit Review. It is expected that any additional VA or non-VA research proposal will be based on, or supplement, the research projected in the narrative of the Career Development application. VA Merit Review Boards examine the merit review budget for the investigator's total VA research program. An investigator with RAG support may apply for a Career Development award. An investigator approved for Career Development funding, except the Associate Investigator, may not apply for RAG funding. Associate Investigators may apply for RAG

support before expiration of their award, or within 6 months of completion of their training term. Approved funding will be allocated only if eligibility requirements are met. If a Research Associate, Clinical Investigator, or Medical Investigator has RAG funding or if a RAG proposal and Career Development application obtain concurrent approvals with fundable priorities, the investigator will receive RAG support as Career Development appointees would normally receive merit review funding. All Career Development appointees may receive extra-VA funding for research. Based upon the awardee's ability to do additional research, because of protected time for research, a Career Development appointee with merit review support may apply for a Merit Review Supplement.

8.02 CAREER DEVELOPMENT APPOINTMENT LEVELS

a. The Associate Investigator award provides research training for VA clinicians with little or no research experience who wish to develop their capability as independent investigators. Applicants must have at least 2 years of clinical training and may begin the award any time after the second post doctoral year of clinical training. The applicant should have no more than 1 year of research experience within the 4 years prior to the initiation of the award. A preceptor who is highly qualified in the field of the research proposed and is fully committed to the applicant's research training must be identified. This commitment includes guidance and research training in the specific area of investigation, aiding the Associate Investigator in publishing research results, and encouraging independence and excellence in scientific research. At least 75 percent of the Associate Investigator's time must be used for training and research experience; the remaining time should be used in appropriate clinical and teaching activities. Appointments are for 3 years and may not be extended or renewed. Associate Investigators may apply for Merit Review funding before completion of their award, but they may not receive Merit Review funding during the term of their appointment. Research funding of \$3,000 per year will be provided by VA Central Office to support their research. The Associate Investigator is excluded from all elements of Physicians' and Dentists' Special Pay (VHS&RA Supp. MP-5, pt. 11, par. 3B.01).

b. The Research Associate award is designed to extend the research training of new clinician-investigators and to develop creative and independent investigators. Applicants for this position must have had previous research training, leading to more than one first-author publication in the area of the research proposed in the application. Evidence must be provided that the applicant has the potential to become an independent investigator. Applicants should be Board eligible in their specialty but not necessarily subspecialty Board eligible. A preceptor who is highly qualified in the field of research proposed and is fully committed to the completion of the applicant's research training must be identified. This commitment includes training for excellence in the field of the proposed research and guidance toward the awardee's independence as an investigator. At least 75 percent of the Research Associate's time must be used in research; the remaining time should be spent in appropriate clinical and teaching activities. Appointments are limited to 4 years and may not be extended or renewed. Research Associates may apply for and receive Merit Review or other independent funding during the terms of their appointments. However, the possession of a funded research program, e.g., Merit Review, at the time of application is an indication that the applicant is already an independent investigator and is therefore not eligible for the Research Associate Award. A limit of \$40,000 per year is placed on "recurring" or non-equipment VA funding provided for these investigators. Research funding of \$5,000 per year will be provided to support the research of Research Associates who have no Merit Review funding or RAG research support. Salary for this term appointment is determined by the facility's Professional Standard Board. Research Associates spending 25 percent of their time clinically are eligible for \$7,000 Primary Incentive Pay annually (VHS&RA Supp. MP-5, pt. II, par. 3B.01).

c. The **Clinical Investigator** award provides independent clinician-scientists an opportunity to expand their scientific background and augment their biomedical research careers with an intensive research experience. Applicants must have research experience in the scientific area of the proposed research, must show evidence of ability to function as independent investigators, and must document consistent and recent research productivity through publications in high quality peer reviewed journals. At least 75 percent of the Clinical Investigator's time must be spent in research; the remaining time should be spent in appropriate clinical and teaching activities. Appointments are limited to 5 years and may not be extended or renewed. **Clinical Investigators** may apply for and receive Merit Review funding during the term of their appointment. Research funding of \$20,000 per year will be provided to support the research of Clinical Investigators who have no Merit Review or RAG funding. Salary for this career appointment is determined by the facility's Professional Standards Board. Clinical Investigators spending 25 percent of their time clinically are eligible for \$7,000 Primary Incentive Pay annually (see VHS&RA Supplement, MP-5, pt. 11, 3B.01). Successful completion of this appointment should lead to a staff position within VA.

d. The **Medical Investigator** award provides established VA investigators clinical and administrative freedom to pursue research activities for a minimum of 50 to 75 percent of their time; the remaining time should be used for appropriate clinical and teaching activities. Applicants must have demonstrated continuing productivity, independence, and originality in research, academic leadership at their medical center, and leadership in the training of new investigators. The excellence of the applicant's research should be recognized at the local and national levels. No VA facility may have more than two active Medical Investigators funded by the Medical Research Service at any one time and only one may be appointed within any 12-month period. Each nomination must include a statement signed by the medical center Director obligating the facility to place the successful Medical Investigator in a staff position at that facility when the Medical Investigator appointment terminates. Appointments are for a period of 6 years and may not be extended or renewed. **Medical Investigators** may apply for and receive Merit Review funding during the term of their appointment. Research funding of \$40,000 per year will be provided to support the research of Medical Investigators who have no Merit Review or RAG funding. Salary for this career appointment is determined by the facility's Professional Standards Board. Medical Investigators are eligible for all elements of Special Pay and Incentive Special Pay except scarce specialty or specific geographic location incentive special pay (See VHS&RA Supp., MP-5, pt. II, 3B.01).

e. The **Senior Medical Investigator** award is for a select number of VA's most distinguished investigators and provides these scientists the maximal opportunity for a continuing VA research career. Applicants must have national and international recognition as leaders in their scientific disciplines. Only VA employees with at least 10 years of VA service are eligible to apply. Appointments are for 4 years and are approved by the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs. New applications are initially screened at the spring Career Development Committee meeting. Those applicants selected for further consideration will be site visited prior to a full formal review of their applications at the fall Career Development Committee meeting. **Senior Medical Investigators** may not apply for and receive Merit Review funding during the term of their appointment. VA research support is initially determined by a Medical Research Service site visit before the Career Development Committee's full review of the Senior Medical Investigator's application. VA research support for a Senior Medical Investigator will be determined every 4 years by a Medical Research Service site visit before the Career Development Committee's review of the Senior Medical Investigator's renewal application. Renewal applications should reach VA Central Office Career

Development Office (151j) in time for the fall review cycle preceding the anniversary date of the original appointment. Salary for Senior Medical Investigators is at the Medical Director grade, Step 7. Awardees are eligible for all elements of Special Pay and Incentive Special pay except scarce specialty or specific geographic location incentive special pay (See VHS&RA Supp., MP-5, pt. II, par. 3B.01).

8.03 APPOINTMENT AUTHORITY FOR EACH AWARD LEVEL

a. Associate Investigators and Research Associates are appointed under the following authorities:

(1) Eligible clinicians are appointed under 38 U.S.C. 4114(a)(1)(A) and VHS&RA Supplement, MP-5, part 11, paragraph 2.08, except those on duty personnel serving under 38 U.S.C. 4104(l) will continue to serve under this authority. Medical and Dental Associate Investigators are paid at a salary level determined locally but not exceeding the level for Intermediate Grade, Step 1. Nurse Associate Investigators are also paid as determined locally but not above the level for Chief Grade, Step 1. (See VHS&RA Supplement, MP-5, pt. 11, ch. 3, par. 3A.13.)

(2) Clinical scientists who are not Title 38 eligible may receive time-limited appointments. Career or career-conditional employees taking assignments as Associate Investigators or Research Associates may do so with no change in the appointment authority. They will be paid at the appropriate grade and step rate determined by the classification of the position to which assigned.

b. Clinical Investigators are appointed under the following authorities:

(1) Eligible clinicians are appointed under 38 U.S.C. 4104.

(2) Initial appointments of other clinical scientists candidates are as general schedule **employees** and may be made under the authority of Schedule B, MP-5, part 1, chapter 302, appendix B, section 213 3227(a) or may be competitive appointments at the discretion of the medical center Director.

c. Medical Investigators and Senior Medical Investigators are appointed under the following authorities:

(1) Eligible clinicians are appointed under 38 U.S.C. 4103 as Senior Medical Investigators and under 38 U.S.C. 4104(i) as Medical Investigators.

(2) Other Scientists: Candidates who meet all the educational and scientific criteria for these positions may be designated as Medical Investigators or Senior Medical Investigators under their current appointment authority and at their current grades and titles.

8.04 INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING CAREER DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

a. Applicants may obtain information concerning forms, instructions, and acknowledgement postal cards from the ACOS/R&D.

b. Applications must be in VA Central Office Career Development office (151j) on or before the semi-annual due dates of December 21 or June 21 for spring or fall review. Assignment of Associate Investigator, Research Associate, and Senior Medical Investigator applications to Career Development Committee members is made by Chief, Career Development Program. Assignments of Clinical Investigator and Medical

Investigator applications to Merit Review Boards are made by the Program Review Division.

c. Applications must be complete and comprehensive upon arrival in VA Central Office. Staffing limitations preclude transmission to reviewers of materials received after the semi-annual due dates. Individual letters of recommendation, human and animal studies approvals, updated bibliographies, and other related items that arrive late will not be inserted into the applications received in VA Central Office. Applications will be considered incomplete and returned if they are illegible, fail to follow instructions or if the material presented is insufficient to permit an adequate review. The responsibility for a complete and timely submission lies with the R&D office at the originating VA medical center.

d. Submit a typed single-spaced original and 30 unbound copies of the proposal duplicated on 21.5 x 27.9 centimeter paper, leaving a 2.6 centimeter binder margin at each edge of each sheet. Black spring clips or rubber bands may be used. Except for the original, which must be duplicated face only, all forms and narrative material must be duplicated back-to-back. If necessary, use a blank sheet of paper as a continuation sheet for the forms. The original will be used as the master file copy. Except for the special VA forms provided, use blank white paper, 21.5 x 27.9 centimeters and elite or 10.5 or 12 point type or its equivalent to ensure a clean imprint suitable for reproduction. Do not submit applications prepared from a dot matrix printer, and do not use photoreduction.

(1) Clinical Investigator and Medical Investigator applications must be accompanied by 20 extra copies of VA Form 10-0102 duplicated back-to-back. They must be separate from the full application.

(2) Type the applicant's name at the lower right side of each page and number each page consecutively, starting with the face sheet, VA Form 10-0102 (e.g., Smith-1 to Smith-22). VA Form 10-0102 and the acknowledgement card should be placed in front of the original proposal. Do not place any attachments in front of VA Form 10-0102. The back of VA Form 10-0102 is to be used for a one-page summary of the research proposal. Head this page with the title of the research proposal, which must not exceed 72 typewritten spaces. Key Words should come from the National Library of Medicine, Permuted Medical Subject Headings. Ad hoc reviewers will be selected using the same Key Words. The Summary should describe briefly the problem to be investigated, how it will be approached, and the significant techniques and methods employed.

(3) A **Table of Contents** must follow VA Form 10-0102. Add the page numbers for the material in the application corresponding to the 13 headings in the Table of Contents. This will help the reviewers locate those specific parts of the application.

(4) **Non-nominating Letters.** The Career Development Committee will accept a single letter from the center Director stating that the Deans Committee and the Research and Development Committee have approved the submission of the application. However, applications should contain all three nominating letters because these letters are an excellent mechanism for expressing critical local enthusiasm and support for the applicant. The Director's letter should include any information pertinent to administrative matters, such as the commitment to offer a staff position to a Medical Investigator at the appointment's termination or to indicate the date of citizenship eligibility for a non-citizen.

(5) **VA Form 10-2850 or SF 171.** All sections must be filled in and the form signed by the applicant. Physicians and dentists should use VA Form 10-2850; Ph.D. clinicians should use SF 171.

(6) **Facilities Available.** In a paragraph or two, describe the research laboratory and its location, specifying whether the laboratory is in a VA facility. If the laboratory is not in a VA facility, the prior approval of the Director, Medical Research Service, should be cited. Describe pertinent resources and major pieces of equipment available to the applicant, avoiding laboratory inventories. Following the description of the laboratory facilities, insert the resources (VA Forms 10 1313-7 and 10 1313-8) of the applicant and of the preceptor, if applicable.

(7) **Candidate's C.V. With Bibliography.** Candidates should indicate current positions and any positions they expect to have between the time of submission of the application and the projected starting date of the Career Development award. Associate Investigator applicants should clearly indicate, year-by-year since obtaining their doctoral degree, the percentage of their time spent in research, and a brief description of any research experience. The bibliography should not exceed two pages and should include a chronological list of all of the most important and pertinent publications, but excluding abstracts, submitted papers, or papers in preparation. The bibliographic format used for the RDIS is suggested. Literature citations must include the full title of the paper referenced. Six copies only of up to five appropriate selected papers may be submitted, but they must be separate from the copies of the proposal. Publications must not be placed in an appendix with each of the 30 photocopies of the proposal.

(8) **Future Plans.** Submit a brief, one-page description of future plans and ambitions. The applicant should explain how the projected Career Development experience fits into these plans. Medical centers may also indicate their own plans for the applicant. At this point, Senior Medical Investigator applications should include their requested budget on VA Forms 10-1313-3,4.

(9) **Research Proposal. The Merit Review format should be followed (See M-3, pt. II, ch. 4):**

- (a) Rationale;
- (b) Statement of the problem to be investigated;
- (c) Hypotheses or key questions to be answered by the study;
- (d) Specific objectives;
- (e) Current status of the particular research proposed;
- (f) Significance of the research;
- (g) Relevance to VA patient care mission;
- (h) Background and work accomplished by the applicant and the preceptor or any collaborator critical to the study;
- (i) Work proposed; and
- (j) Methods of procedures and data analysis.

(k) Resources

(l) Collaboration

(m) Literature references, with full titles of each published paper cited.

e. Associate Investigator proposal narratives must be limited to 10 pages and should describe the research that the applicant will be doing. All other narratives must be limited to 15 pages. Detailed methodology of no more than five pages may be placed at the end of the applications as an addendum.

f. Include reference letters as part of the completed application when it is submitted to VA Central Office. The letters from respondents should include those indicated in the applicant's VA Form 10-2850 or SF 171. A letter from the proposed preceptor must be included with each Associate Investigator and Research Associate application and should be inserted just before the preceptor's C.V. and bibliography. This letter is especially critical for the Associate Investigator application because it describes the content of the applicant's proposed research training experience from the preceptor's point of view. This letter should contain 1) a brief description of the distribution of the preceptor's time in research, patient care, teaching and administration; 2) an explicit description of the preceptor's current obligations, including the number of residents, fellows and other trainees that the preceptor is supervising in research; and 3) a description of the role of the applicant in the preceptor's research program, including the training experiences planned by the preceptor for the applicant, the nature of the preceptor's interaction with the applicant, the percentage of the preceptor's effort that will be devoted to the applicant, and the degree and type of interaction that the applicant will gain from other researchers in the preceptor's program or elsewhere at the medical center.

g. Preceptor's C.V. with Bibliography: Preceptors are required only for Associate Investigator and Research Associate applicants.

h. Delineation Of Clinical Role: The appropriate Service Chief or Section Head should submit a statement describing the proposed patient care role of the applicant upon receiving the Career Development award. An indication of the applicant's expected percent time in non-research activities should be included.

i. Approval For Human Studies: Clinical research proposals and other studies involving human subjects will not be reviewed until they have been approved by VA medical center or affiliated University Subcommittee on Human Studies. A complete and current VA Form 10-1223, Report or Subcommittee on Human Studies, dated no earlier than 1 year before the receipt date of the application, must be submitted with the application and must be accompanied by VA Form 10-1086 consent form that will be presented to each subject or legally responsible representative prior to the subject's participation in the study.

j. Animal Component of Research Protocol Statement: Research proposals involving the use of animals will not be reviewed unless they contain and conform to a completed checklist as outlined in M- 3, part 1, chapter 12, and signed and dated by the veterinarian. This information containing the approval of the Subcommittee on Animal Studies, dated no earlier than 1 year before the receipt date of the application, must be

submitted with the proposal. Prior to review, proposals using animals are mail reviewed by individual VA or non-VA veterinary animal specialists chosen for experience, knowledge, and research in laboratory animal science and medicine. Recommendations from these veterinarians are evaluated by the Career Development Committee and are then forwarded with the results to the investigator.

k. Biohazard Statement: Proposals that contain procedures that constitute a potential or possible biohazard will not be reviewed unless accompanied by a current explanation of safety precautions to be taken. A signed and dated statement of the local VA or university Biohazard Committee on Safety must also be submitted with the proposal.