

CSR News Flash

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Center for Scientific Review
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New Data Gives Insight on NIH Peer Reviews of Clinical Research Applications

The *American Journal of Medicine* has published new data that sheds light on why clinical research applications do not fare as well as basic science applications in peer reviews at the National Institutes of Health. The NIH Center for Scientific Review (CSR) initiated this study to follow-up its earlier studies to address the perception that clinical research grant applications are disadvantaged in the NIH peer review process.

The study shows that nearly all of the difference in review outcomes between these two types of applications is related to the fact that clinical applicants who have RO1 grants are less likely to submit an application revision or a competitive renewal of their grants. A contributing, but secondary, factor is the difficulty some clinical applicants have in addressing human protection requirements.

“We saw it as our duty to get to the bottom of the issue,” said CSR Director Dr. Toni Scarpa. “Though we are relieved to know the problem is not with our reviewers or review system, we will not rest,” he continued. “We will continue to monitor and evaluate our efforts and work to ensure that all research receives fair and expert reviews.”

The recent study examined the review outcome of 62,735 nonclinical and 30,187 clinical grant applications (RO1s) reviewed between October 2000 and May 2004. The clinical research applications received less favorable scores. Of all the clinical research applications, 14.8 percent were found to have human subjects concerns by their reviewers.

While 28.3 percent of the nonclinical researchers who had an R01 grant application submitted competing renewal applications, only 20 percent of the clinical researchers who had a R01 grant did. This difference has a major impact on the overall success rate of clinical grant applications because both revised and renewal applications receive more favorable scores than new applications.

The full text of this article is available online: [“Why Are Peer Review Outcomes Less Favorable for Clinical Science than for Basic Science Grant Applications?”](#) *American Journal of Medicine*, Volume 121, Issue 7, Pages 637-641 (July 2008).

The study team was led by Dr. Michael Martin, Senior Advisor to the CSR Director, with assistance from CSR’s former Clinical Research Advisor, Dr. Theodore Kotchen, who is a professor of medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

About CSR

The Center for Scientific Review organizes the peer review groups that evaluate the majority of grant applications submitted to the National Institutes of Health. These groups include experienced and respected researchers from across the country and abroad. Since 1946, CSR’s mission has been to see that NIH grant applications receive fair, independent, expert, and timely reviews — free from inappropriate influences — so NIH can fund the most promising research. CSR also receives all incoming applications and assigns them to the NIH institutes and centers that fund grants. For more information, go to our Web site—<http://www.csr.nih.gov>—or phone 301-435-1111.

