

RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM AND AWARDS

1. REASON FOR ISSUE. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides programmatic changes to the Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program in the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D).

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES. This Handbook contains minor revisions to current RR&D RCS procedures. It changes the eligibility requirement for non-clinician scientists who are neither principal nor co-principal investigators on Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)-funded peer-reviewed research programs but have a record of demonstrated commitment to VA rehabilitation research; they may also be eligible for the RCS program. It also deletes all program information with temporary, expiration, or rescission dates. RR&D program documents with temporary, expiration, or rescission dates will be updated as necessary, and will be available electronically at www.rehab.research.va.gov.

3. RELATED DOCUMENTS. VHA Directive 1203.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE. The VHA Office of RR&D is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook.

5. RESCISSION. VHA Handbook 1203.3 dated April 16, 2002, is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION. This document is scheduled for re-certification on or before the last working day of August 2013.

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DISTRIBUTION CO: E-mailed 8/20/2008
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 8/20/2008

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RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM AND AWARDS

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides policy and guidance related to the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program. **NOTE:** *RR&D RCS program documents with temporary, expiration, or rescission dates will be updated as necessary, and will be available electronically, at www.rehab.research.va.gov.*

2. SCOPE

The RR&D RCS program is a highly selective program designed to sustain and enhance the research careers of established non-clinician scientists who have demonstrated commitment to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rehabilitation research. Salary support for non-clinician scientists historically has been available through a variety of mechanisms, including the Merit Review and the RCS programs. The RR&D RCS program is intended to provide recognition and salary support for outstanding non-clinician scientists in VA. Non-clinician scientists who are either principal or co-principal investigators on VA-funded peer-reviewed research programs and salaried by VA RR&D are eligible to apply for the RCS award (see VHA Handbook 1200.15 at http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1411). VA clinicians who have switched from a clinical career track to a research track or non-clinician scientists who have a record of demonstrated commitment to VA rehabilitation research may also be eligible for the RCS program. Non-clinician scientists contribute to VA research programs not only because of their direct contributions to scientific knowledge, but because they serve as mentors for clinician and non-clinician investigators. They furnish an important expertise that complements the research programs of the clinical staff.

3. PROCEDURES

a. **Award Levels.** The RCS designation comprises two levels: RCS (a 5-year award), and Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS) (a 7-year award).

b. **Qualifications.** The title, RCS, may be awarded to established, independent investigators who have distinguished themselves through scientific achievement, and who contribute to the VA research program through participation in research activities, including: training and mentoring junior VA scientists; functioning as a resource for the research community; serving on VA research or other committees; and collaborating with clinician investigators. A limited number of these prestigious awards are available for RR&D Service. Applicants must be in receipt of VA research funding or other national peer-reviewed research support. Academic appointments should be at the Associate Professor or Professor level.

c. **RCS Award.** Nationally recognized VA scientists with a minimum of 6 years of national peer-reviewed research support may apply for the RR&D RCS award. Initial awards are for 5 years and are renewable indefinitely, subject to review by the RR&D RCS Committee. Renewal is contingent on availability of funds and is dependent on continuation of peer-reviewed research support and participation in research activities such as: training and mentoring junior VA scientists; functioning as a resource for the research community; serving on VA research or other committees; and collaborating with clinician investigators. RCS awardees apply for award renewal after completion of the third year of each 5-year award. RCS awardees may apply for a SRCS after completion of their fifth RCS year.

d. **SRCS Award.** Outstanding VA scientists who are recognized internationally as leaders in their field may apply for the RR&D SRCS award. These senior level awards are for 7 years and are renewable indefinitely, subject to committee review. Renewal is contingent on availability of funds and is dependent on continuation of peer-reviewed research support and participation in research activities such as: training and mentoring junior VA scientists; functioning as a resource for the research community; serving on VA research or other committees; and collaborating with clinician investigators. SRCS may apply for award renewal after completion of the fourth year of each 7-year award.

e. **Position Classification.** RCS and SRCS are eligible to receive VA salary support, as long as they continue to secure research funding, and bridge support, if needed, to carry them between funded projects. However, it should be noted that position classification is a separate process from the RCS or SRCS application, and a separate application is required for position classification or promotion (see VHA Handbook 1200.3 at http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=358). Applications for General Schedule (GS)-14 or GS-15 civil service appointments, if applicable, must be included with the RCS or SRCS application. Some VA or university committee and teaching responsibilities are considered appropriate for a fully VA-supported RCS or SRCS. However, VA salary support for the RCS or SRCS award will be reduced commensurate with the reduction of research time available if the awardee holds significant administrative positions at VA or a university. **NOTE:** *VHA will obtain the concurrence of the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration (006).*

f. **Review.** Qualified applicants for RCS and SRCS awards are evaluated by the RR&D RCS Committee in accordance with the following criteria:

(1) A record of successful past and current VA research support; a record of demonstrated commitment to VA rehabilitation research or successful competition as a principal investigator for significant; or extra-VA research funding from a national program that utilizes a level of scientific peer review equivalent to that of VA.

(2) A minimum of 5/8 time research-related commitment to VA.

(3) Publications in widely-read refereed journals, particularly as the first or senior author.

(4) Invitations to speak or chair sessions at national or international meetings.

(5) Service on national scientific advisory or peer review committees or editorial boards of scientific journals.

(6) Recognition by peers as a leader in a research field with relevance to VA rehabilitation.

(7) Interaction with clinicians or managers in support of VA patient care programs.

(8) An active role in the education and formal training of young scientists.

g. **Initial Applications.** Applications must be received by RR&D Service by March 1 (for Spring review) or September 1 (for Fall review) (see Appendix A for specific instructions).

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Applications for GS-14 or GS-15 civil service appointments, if applicable, must be included with the RCS or SRCS application (see VHA Handbook 1200.3 at http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=358).

h. **Applications for Renewal of Awards.** Applications for renewal of RCS or SRCS awards must be received by the deadlines for the first review cycle following completion of the third or fourth year of the award for RCS and SRCS awardees, respectively. Applications for renewal of RCS or SRCS awards follow the same format as in the Initial Application (see Appendix A). ***NOTE:** RR&D program documents with temporary, expiration, or rescission dates will be updated as necessary, and will be available electronically, at www.rehab.research.va.gov.*

4. INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST AWARDS

For specific instructions regarding requirements, format, content, mailing instructions, deadlines inquiries and any other additional information, please refer to the RR&D website at www.va.rehab.research.gov.