MDRC

MANAGEMENT DECISION AND RESEARCH CENTER

**National Survey of VA Researchers
2002**

**Volume 1
Network Results: VISN 17**

2002 Survey of VA Researchers:
Results for VISN 17

This section of the 2002 Survey of VA Researchers report presents results based on the responses from 96 researchers in VISN 17 who completed the survey.

Descriptive results for VISN 17 are presented in eight tables. Characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2.1. Researchers' evaluations of the status of research in VA are presented in Tables 2.2 through 2.6. Researchers' views of the attractiveness of their VA position are presented in Table 2.7. Table 2.8 is a summary of VISN performance and tracks VISN trends on seven scales over time and compares the VISN scores on those scales with the VA national averages. Definitions of the scales are included as an appendix.

VISN 17 Researcher Satisfaction in 2002

On most questions, VISN 17 researchers reported that they were more satisfied than dissatisfied with research in VA. However, substantial dissatisfaction was also expressed.

1. Researchers were most satisfied with:

   - Autonomy to choose their research direction (83% satisfied; Table 2.3); and
   - Enjoyment of the research (81% satisfied; Table 2.3).

2. Researchers were particularly dissatisfied with:

   - Opportunities to contribute to VISN decision making (51% dissatisfied; Table 2.4);
   - Amount of paperwork (49% dissatisfied; Table 2.3);
   - Availability of clerical support (49% dissatisfied; Table 2.2); and
   - Synergy among researchers in their VISN (48% dissatisfied; Table 2.4).

3. Researchers reported that research opportunities and support were important to recruitment and retention.[2] Specifically:

   - 49% of researchers indicated that they themselves would not work in VA without research opportunities (Table 2.7); and
   - 75% judged that research opportunities and support were important for recruiting and retaining high quality clinicians in VA.

4. Beginning in 2001, the researcher survey included a new series of items about satisfaction with VISN support for research. Nationally and in VISN 17, researchers reported relatively low satisfaction on these VISN-focused items (Table 2.4).

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[2] Questions related to this topic utilized various response scales; therefore, not all questions are included in tables in this report.

5. Five new questions in the 2002 survey asked about satisfaction with the functions and services of the Office of Research Compliance and Assurance (ORCA). Researchers gave mostly neutral responses on each of these questions (Table 2.6). For example:

- Communications with ORCA (72% neutral).

Comparison of VISN 17 and VA National Averages

Significance testing (Table 2.8) indicated that VISN 17 researchers' satisfaction with their Research Work was lower than the 2002 national average, while scores on satisfaction with VISN support for research (VISN Leadership Support and Overall VISN Support) were statistically higher than the national average in 2002.

VISN 17 Changes in Ratings from Earlier Years

Table 2.8 also displays VISN 17 scale scores for 1998 through 2002. VISN 17 scores remained stable from 2001 to 2002.

Table 2.1. Characteristics of 2002 Respondents in VISN 17 and Nationwide

Characteristic	Categories	VISN 17 (n=96) Percent	VA Nationwide (n=2356) Percent
Principal Research Affiliation	Medical	73	69
	Rehabilitation	6	7
	Health Services	8	14
	Cooperative Studies	7	5
	Other	7	5
Years in VHA	0 to 5	37	22
	6 to 10	12	20
	Over 10	51	59
Clinical Affiliation	Surgery	8	9
	Rehabilitation	4	4
	General Internal Medicine	13	12
	Medical Subspecialty	32	34
	Psychiatry / Psychology	16	17
	Dentistry	4	1
	Other	19	18
	None	3	6
Gender	Female	26	29
Ethnicity	African-American	4	1
	Asian or Pacific Islander	11	10
	Hispanic	4	3
	White	74	83
	Other	6	3
Research Project Funding	Any	89	90
	VA	52	59
	Other Federal	38	47
	Foundation	25	26
	Pharmaceutical / Business	41	36
Principal Investigator Funding	Any	91	87
	VA	51	55
	Other Federal	33	37
	Foundation	21	22
	Pharmaceutical / Business	40	31
Degree	PhD only	24	31
	MD (MD only or MD/PhD)	76	69

Table 2.2. Satisfaction with Research Support at the Local Facility

Question 1		VISN 17 (n=96) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
		Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a	Availability of RAs / technologists	34	25	40	32	25	42
b	Availability of clerical support	49	21	29	54	21	25
c	Competence of support staff	19	29	52	21	25	54
d	Assistance with research project management	26	33	40	29	22	49
e	Availability of collaborators	22	21	57	15	19	66
f	Mentoring / collegial support	25	26	48	20	22	58
g	Office space / facilities	35	19	46	30	20	50
h	Laboratory space / facilities	27	24	49	31	21	48
i	Animal care facilities	10	33	57	14	19	68
j	Supportiveness of local VA leadership	23	20	57	26	21	53
k	Supportiveness of affiliated university	19	22	58	20	23	57
l	Adequacy of protected research time	39	13	48	37	18	44
m	Computer systems / support	15	25	60	28	21	50
n	Libraries	13	20	67	21	21	58

Table 2.3. Satisfaction with Research Work at Local VA

Question 2		VISN 17 (n=96) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
		Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a	Salary / fringe benefits	33	23	44	27	26	47
b	Future security of research opportunities	30	34	36	36	33	31
n	Job security	15	21	65	16	22	62
c	Workload	28	27	46	27	30	43
d	Level of stress	30	33	37	33	30	37
e	Opportunities for creativity	24	28	47	17	20	62
f	Opportunities to use my skills	17	23	60	14	18	67
g	Opportunities to expand my skills	23	33	45	19	24	56
h	Enjoyment of the research	6	13	81	5	10	85
i	Autonomy to choose research direction	10	7	83	4	10	86
j	Amount of paperwork	49	28	22	55	27	19
k	Communication within local research services	23	29	48	24	28	48
l	Overall satisfaction with local research environment	20	29	51	24	24	52
m	Attractiveness of my position compared to other job opportunities	24	27	49	19	30	51

Table 2.4. Satisfaction with Research Support from the VISN

Question 3	VISN 17 (n=96) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Supportiveness of VISN leadership	25	43	32	42	35	23
b VISN support for protected time	38	33	29	49	32	19
c VISN educational programs	24	47	29	37	44	19
d VISN support for specific projects	26	38	36	44	38	18
e Opportunities to contribute to decisions	51	38	11	56	33	11
f VISN rewards and recognition for research	40	39	21	55	34	11
g Synergy among researchers in VISN	48	36	15	47	36	17
h VISN recognition of work at university	47	40	14	55	34	11

Table 2.5. Satisfaction with Support from the National Research Office

Question 4	VISN 17 (n=96) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Supportiveness of VA research headquarters	26	38	36	22	37	41
b Communications w/VA research headquarters	26	41	32	25	40	35
c VA letter of intent process	17	38	44	15	40	45
d VA grant review process	20	37	44	21	33	46
e Funding level, VA investigator initiated grants	32	39	29	38	31	31

Table 2.6. Satisfaction with ORCA Functions & Services

Question 5	VISN 17 (n=96) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Benefits to the VA research program of the ORCA national office	17	56	27	21	54	25
b Benefits to the VA research program of the ORCA field offices	15	68	17	21	57	22
c Communications with ORCA	16	72	12	22	60	18
d Usefulness of ORCA TED[1] initiative	20	63	17	24	56	19
e Usefulness of ORCA MAP[2] reviews	19	72	8	23	62	15

[1]Training, Education, and Development
[2]Mini Assessment Program

Table 2.7. Attractiveness of VA Position

Questions 6-11, 13[1]		VISN 17 (n=96) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
		No[2]	Neutral	Yes[3]	No[2]	Neutral	Yes[3]
6	If you had to decide all over again, do you think you would choose a career in the VA?	16	26	58	17	25	58
7	Would you recommend a research career in the VA to a colleague?	19	23	58	24	23	53
8	Do you think you will look for a job outside of the VA in the next year?	65	19	16	62	18	20
9	Is it likely that you will retire from the VA in the next five years?	72	12	17	67	13	20
10	Do you personally know of any individual whose recruitment to VA was made possible by the availability of research opportunities and support in the VA?	42	NA	58	36	NA	64
11	Do you personally know of an individual who could not be recruited to the VA because opportunities and support for research in the VA were insufficient?	54	NA	46	52	NA	48
13	If research opportunities were not available in the VA, how likely do you think it is that you would currently be working in the VA system?[4]	49	NA	51	62	NA	38

NA = Not applicable; no neutral response category for this question.
[1]Question 12 not included in this table because of differences in response scale.
[2]Includes "probably not" and "no."
[3]Includes "probably yes" and "yes."
[4]Respondents indicating that there was less than or equal to a 5% chance that they would work in VA if research opportunities were not available were defined as "No."

Table 2.8. VISN 17 Performance Summary: Trends Within VISN and Comparison with VA National Average

	Research Work	Local Support	VISN Leadership Support	Overall VISN Support	National Research Program	Protected Time for Research	ORCA Functions
1998	3.65	3.52	3.23	NA	2.97	3.60	NA
1999	3.62	3.54	3.11	NA	3.26	3..68	NA
2000	3.59	3.20	2.98	NA	2.87	3.05	NA
2001	3.57	3.32	3.06	2.89	3.07	3.16	NA
2002	3.45	3.35	3.10	2.78	3.12	3.19	2.93
Change	-.12	+.03	+.04	-.11	+.05	+.03	---
VA 2002	3.59	3.30	2.69	2.48	3.14	3.08	2.91
VISN vs. VA	-.14*	+.05	+.41**	+.30*	-.02	+.11	+.02

All measures reported in this table utilized a 1-5 response scale with a higher score indicative of higher levels of satisfaction. Scale definitions are provided in the appendix to this chapter; scale development is described in the national summary chapter.

VISN Leadership Support is a single-item measure of the supportiveness of VISN leadership (Q3a).

Overall VISN Support is a more comprehensive scale that includes the VISN leadership item (Q3a) and seven others (Q3b through Q3h) representing a variety of VISN-based research support activities.

Change = change in VISN score from 2001 to 2002. A positive score indicates an improvement in research satisfaction from 2001 to 2002; a negative score indicates a decline in researcher satisfaction from 2001 to 2002. Change scores flagged by an asterisk (*) were statistically significant (p<.05).

VA 2002 = VA national average in 2002.

VISN vs. VA = difference between the 2002 VISN score and the 2002 VA national average. A positive score indicates that satisfaction among researchers in the VISN was higher than the national average; a negative score indicates that satisfaction among researchers in the VISN was lower than the national average. Significant differences are flagged. A single asterisk (*) indicates a difference between the VISN and national average that was significant (p<.05) without a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons, but was not significant when the Bonferroni adjustment was applied. Double asterisks (**) indicate a difference between the VISN and national average that was significant (p<.05) even after the Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons was applied (i.e., a difference that was significant both with and without the Bonferroni adjustment).

NA = Not available; questions for this scale were not included in the survey for the year in question.

Survey of
VA Researchers
2002

This study is being conducted for VA national Office of Research and Development to assess researchers' views about the status of VA research. People's experiences may differ based upon the type of research they do and their local environment; therefore, it is important to hear from all those doing research. The survey is being repeated to track changes in the status of VA research. To facilitate assessment of changes, please complete the questionnaire whether or not you completed it in a previous year. There are no right or wrong answers; we are interested in your views and experiences.

Remember that your answers will be confidential and no one will be able to identify your individual responses. The return envelope has an identification number on it only so we will know when your questionnaire is returned. Once received, the questionnaire will be separated from the envelope. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire or associated with the results in any way. Please take the time to complete this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Your help is appreciated.

This questionnaire is meant for people who are actively involved in research. If you are not involved in research, please check the box below and return the questionnaire in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

☐   **I am not doing research at this point in my career.**

Q1. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **facilities and support for your research at your local VA**. (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Availability of research assistants / technologists	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Availability of clerical support for my research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Competence of support staff	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	Assistance with grant management and administration	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Availability of research collaborators	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
F.	Mentoring / collegial support	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
G.	Office space / facilities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
H.	Laboratory space / facilities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I.	Animal care facilities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
J.	Supportiveness of my local VA facility leadership	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
K.	Supportiveness of my affiliated university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
L.	The adequacy of my protected time for research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
M.	Computer systems / support	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
N.	Libraries / reference sources	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Go to Question 2 next.

Q2. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of your **research work at your local VA**. (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Salary / fringe benefits	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Future security of research opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Workload	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	Level of stress	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Opportunities for creativity	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
F.	Opportunities to use my skills	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
G.	Opportunities to expand my skills	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
H.	Enjoyment of the research I am doing	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I.	Autonomy to choose my research direction	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
J.	Amount of paperwork	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
K.	Communication within the research services of my local VA	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
L.	Overall satisfaction with my local VA research environment	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
M.	Attractiveness of my position compared to other available job opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
N.	Job security	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Go to Question 3 next.

Q3. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **support and opportunities for your research work in your VISN**. (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Supportiveness of my VISN leadership	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	VISN support for protected time for research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Educational programs provided by my VISN	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	VISN support for specific research projects	1	2	3	4	5	**N/A**
E.	Opportunities to contribute to VISN decision making	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
F.	VISN rewards and recognition supporting research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
G.	Synergy among researchers in my VISN	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
H.	VISN recognition of my contributions at my affiliated university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Q4. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **support and opportunities for your research work in the national VA system**. (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Supportiveness of VA Research Headquarters	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Communication with VA Research Headquarters	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	VA Letter of Intent process	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	VA Grant Review process	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Funding level for VA Investigator Initiated Grants	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Go to Question 5 next.

Q5. The Office of Research Compliance and Assurance (ORCA) has been established within the Office of the Under Secretary for Health to advise the Under Secretary on all matters related to the protection of human research participants, laboratory animal welfare, research safety, and research misconduct. ORCA functions to promote and enhance the ethical conduct of research and oversee the investigation of allegations of research improprieties in conformance with applicable regulations and policies.

Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **ORCA functions and services.** (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Benefits to the VA Research Program of the ORCA national office	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Benefits to the VA Research Program of the ORCA field offices	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Communications with ORCA	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	Usefulness of ORCA TED (Training, Education, and Development) initiative	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Usefulness of ORCA MAP (Mini Assessment Program) performance reviews	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Q6. If you had to decide all over again, do you think you would choose a career in the VA? (Circle one.)

1. Yes, Definitely
2. Probably
3. 50 / 50 Chance
4. Probably Not
5. No, Definitely Not

Q7. Would you recommend a research career in the VA to a colleague?

1. Yes, Definitely
2. Probably
3. 50 / 50 Chance
4. Probably Not
5. No, Definitely Not

Go to Question 8 next.

Q8. Do you think you will look for a job outside of the VA in the next year?

        1. Yes, Definitely
        2. Probably
        3. 50 / 50 Chance
        4. Probably Not
        5. No, Definitely Not

Q9. Is it likely that you will retire from the VA in the next five years?

        1. Yes, Definitely
        2. Probably
        3. 50 / 50 Chance
        4. Probably Not
        5. No, Definitely Not

Q10. Do you personally know of any individual whose recruitment to the VA was made possible by the availability of research opportunities and support in the VA?

        1. No
        2. Yes

Q11. Do you personally know of an individual who could not be recruited to the VA because opportunities and support for research in the VA were insufficient?

        1. No
        2. Yes

Q12. How important are research opportunities and support to recruiting and retaining high quality clinicians
in the VA?

        0. Don't know
        1. Not at all important
        2. Not very important
        3. Moderately important
        4. Very important
        5. Extremely important

Q13. If research opportunities were <u>not</u> available in the VA, how likely do you think it is that you would currently be working in the VA system?
        _____% chance that I would be working in the VA

Go to Question 14 next.

Background Questions

Q14. Are you: (Check one.)

❑ Female
❑ Male

Q15. How long have you worked at the VA? (Check one.)

❑ 0 to 5 years
❑ 6 to 10 years

❑ *Over 10 years*

Q16. What is your age? (Check one.)

❑ 20-29
❑ 30-39
❑ 40-49
❑ 50-59
❑ 60 or older

Q17. What is your racial/ethnic background? (Check one.)

❑ African American
❑ American Indian or Alaskan Native
❑ Asian or Pacific Islander
❑ Hispanic
❑ White
❑ Multiracial
❑ Don't Know
❑ Other (please specify)_____

Go to Question 18 next.

Q18. With which VA Research Service are you most closely affiliated? (Check one.)

❑ Medical Research
❑ Nursing Research
❑ Rehabilitation Research
❑ Health Services Research
❑ Cooperative Studies/Trials
❑ Other (please specify) _____

Q19. With which VA Clinical Service/Section are you most closely affiliated? (Check one.)

❑ Surgery
❑ Rehabilitation
❑ General Internal Medicine
❑ Subspecialty of Internal Medicine
❑ Psychiatry / Psychology
❑ Pharmacy
❑ Nursing
❑ Dentistry
❑ None
❑ Other (please specify) _____

Q20. Are you currently receiving research grant or contract funding from the following sources?
(Please check all that apply.)

❑ VA
❑ NIH
❑ Other Federal agencies
❑ Foundations
❑ Pharmaceutical companies or other businesses
❑ Other sources

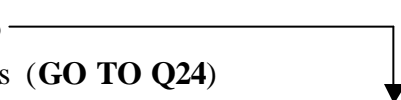**Go to Question 21 next.**

Q21. Are you currently a **principal investigator** on a grant or contract from the following sources?
(Please check all that apply.)

- ❑ VA
- ❑ NIH
- ❑ Other Federal agencies
- ❑ Foundations
- ❑ Pharmaceutical companies or other businesses
- ❑ Other sources

Q22. Please indicate whether you have any of the following advanced degrees:
(Please check all that apply.)

- ❑ Masters degree (Specify field: _____)
- ❑ Ph.D. (Specify field: _____)
- ❑ Medical degree (e.g., MD, DO)
- ❑ Dental degree (e.g., DDS)
- ❑ Other: Specify: _____

Q23. Do you work full time for VA?
- ❑ No
- ❑ Yes (**GO TO Q24**)

        Q23a. What is your fraction in VA (in percent)? _____ %
        Q23b. Do you also have a university appointment?
            - ❑ No
            - ❑ Yes

Q24. What percentage of your VA time is devoted to the following activities?
(Note: These percentages should add to **100% of your total VA time**.)

Research:	_____ %
Clinical Care:	_____ %
Administration:	_____ %
Clinical Training / Education:	_____ %
Research Training / Education:	_____ %
Other:	_____ %
Total	100 %

Questionnaire concludes on the next page.

Is there anything else you would like to let us know about working on research in the VA? If so, please use this space for that purpose. We are interested in any recommendations you have concerning how your local VA research environment could be improved.

Your contribution to this effort to better understand VA researchers' experiences and views is greatly appreciated. Thank you very much for your help. Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed
postage-paid envelope.

Mark Meterko, PhD
SOVAR Project 2002
C/o Atlantic Marketing Research Company, Inc.
109 State Street
Boston, MA 02109

Appendix B. Scale Definitions

Scale	Definition	Survey Items
Research Work	Satisfaction with own research work (e.g., levels of stress, opportunities for creativity, attractiveness of my position compared with other available job opportunities).	Q2c - Q2i and Q2m
Local Support	Satisfaction with local VA facilities and support (e.g., availability of support staff, computer systems/support, laboratory space).	Q1b - Q1d, Q1f - Q1j, Q1m, Q1n, Q2k and Q2L
VISN Leadership Support	Satisfaction with supportiveness of VISN leadership	Q3a
Overall VISN Support	Satisfaction with VISN support and opportunities (e.g., VISN rewards and recognition supporting research, VISN support for specific research projects, supportiveness of VISN leadership)	Q3a - Q3h
National Research Program	Satisfaction with support and opportunities in VA national research system (e.g., supportiveness of research headquarters, satisfaction with grant review process)	Q4a - Q4e
Protected Time for Research	Adequacy of own protected time for research	Q1L
ORCA Functions	Satisfaction with aspects of ORCA functions and services	Q5a – Q5e