

FORUM

VA HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

MARCH 2000

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Having completed the tenth year of the HSR&D Career Development Program, it's a good time to take a look at where we've come from, what we have gained, and what we hope for the future of the program, the jewel in the crown of HSR&D.

This special supplement to FORUM offers a short history of the Career Development Program, an overview of the program's opportunities, and a description of the various program elements and eligibility requirements. We are very proud of all of our Career Development awardees and, in illustration, provide brief profiles of six awardees to give a sense of the depth and breadth of the program.

Another way that HSR&D builds capacity is through our collaboration with the Office of Academic Affiliations to provide pre- and post-doctoral training opportunities. In this issue, we supply general information about training opportunities and contact information for specific training sites.

One of my key priorities is to continue to grow these programs and reap the benefits of our expanded health services research capacity. Thanks in part to these programs, we can look forward to a bright future.

*John G. Demakis, M.D.
Director, VA HSR&D Service*

COMMENTARY

HSR&D's Career Development Program: Investing in VA's Future

By Robert Small and John G. Demakis, M.D.

What is the single most important thing that VA's HSR&D Service has going for it? The answer is simple: its nationwide network of outstanding health services researchers. Its researchers are HSR&D's most valuable assets.

In 1990, HSR&D launched its Career Development Program to develop and nourish those assets. The program has three goals: (1) to help clinicians develop skills as health services research investigators, (2) to encourage VA medical center clinicians to pursue careers in health services, and (3) to build health services research capacity in VA. Now entering its 11th year, the program has realized its goals and become a highly successful capacity-building program for VA health services research.

While the quality of applicants continues to be high, admission to the program remains selective.

The quality of Career Development awardees entering the program has always been exceptional. They come from leading academic institutions and bring with them training and demonstrated potential in their areas of interest. While the quality of applicants continues to be high, admission to the

program remains selective.

The program has grown over the years, both in size and diversity. Although 67 percent of our awardees are general medicine physicians, increasing numbers of applicants with specialty backgrounds – including surgery, cardiology, neurology, infectious disease, dentistry, psychiatry, clinical psychology, and nursing – have competed successfully for awards. This fiscal year, HSR&D is proud to welcome its first two nurses to the program, and we are exploring ways to create more opportunities in the program for nurses and other clinicians.

New Awards Create New Opportunities

To make the program more accessible while at the same time protecting the core awards, the Research Career Development and the Advanced Research Career Development awards, the Office of Research and Development last year introduced two new programs of training awards. The Clinical Research Career Development and Associate Investigator programs help prepare clinicians and non-clinician PhDs just starting out in research to compete for future Career Development or other merit review awards.

The Clinical Research Career

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COMMENTARY

Commentary

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Development Program was developed to provide fully trained clinicians of all types who have doctoral degrees with up to three years of salary and research support to complete didactic training and develop clinical research skills. The program, including the basic award, has changed significantly since its announcement last June, and it is now administered by the Cooperative Studies Program.

We will continue to measure the program's success by the productivity of awardees, the success we have in keeping them employed in VA, and the active roles they assume in training and mentoring the next generation of health services researchers.

The Associate Investigator Program is our most junior-level program and is open to clinicians and non-clinician post-doctoral researchers with little or no research experience. Associate investigators are appointed to work as trainees under the supervision of funded principal investigators for the duration of the sponsoring investigator's project or for a maximum of four years.

The Associate Investigator and Clinical Research Career Development programs offer two new avenues of Career Development. We believe this will enhance the overall value of Career Development as a mechanism for recruiting young talent into VA. It is important to remember that these programs can be used as recruiting

tools to bring bright, talented clinician and non-clinician postdoctoral researchers into VA. To be considered, they need not be VA employees at the time they apply.

In 1998, a final tier of Career Development awards was added to provide established VA independent investigators a sabbatical opportunity to pursue up to one year of training in a new area of research. This Career Development Enhancement award is available to established clinician investigators who have been with VA for at least six years.

Although not technically a developmental program, the Research Career Scientist Program is considered a complementary adjunct to the Career Development Program. It was established as a way to recognize the contributions of selected outstanding VA non-clinician scientists who have distinguished themselves as health services researchers, have been active in mentoring and teaching roles, and have achieved national recognition as leaders in their areas of expertise. There are two levels of this award, Research Career Scientist and Senior Research Career Scientist. Although the award originally provided recognition

only, it was revised in 1998 to provide salary support as well.

HSR&D funds six Research Career Scientist awards and two Senior Research Career Scientist awards. Unlike Career Development awards, these are renewable indefinitely. Rudy Moos, Ph.D., Senior Research Career Scientist and Director of the HSR&D Center of Excellence in Palo Alto, was the first person to receive an HSR&D RCS award, back in 1991. Last year, Dr. Moos also became the first recipient of the VA Under Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievements in Health Services Research.

An Important Investment in VA's Future

As we set new goals for the Career Development Program, we will continue to measure its success by the productivity of awardees, the success we have in keeping them employed in VA, and the active roles they assume in training and mentoring the next generation of health services researchers. So far, we have scored high marks on all of these points.

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Pre- and Post-Doctoral Training Programs at VA HSR&D

The VA has several important missions, including education. In keeping with this mission, HSR&D collaborates with the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) to sponsor pre- and post-doctoral training programs in health services research and medical informatics. These training programs are a national resource for building health services research expertise both within VA and in the greater health care community.

All of the pre- and post-doctoral training programs are conducted at OAA approved training sites and are administered locally at these sites. To apply, contact the local sites for these programs (see page 8). For general information about HSR&D collaborations with the OAA, please contact: Jay A. Freedman, Ph.D., at 202/408-3662, or email Jay.freedman@mail.va.gov.

An Overview of HSR&D's Career Development Opportunities

Career development opportunities are available to VA health services researchers at virtually every stage of their career, from young investigator to established scientist. Following are brief descriptions of the four HSR&D Career Development awards, each containing key information about the purpose of each award, eligibility requirements, duration of award, salary and support, and work site requirements. For more information about the awards, contact Robert Small at 202/273-8256 or email robert.small@mail.va.gov.

Associate Investigator

Purpose: To provide supplemental funds to principal investigators of funded, ongoing merit review projects to support a trainee. Associate Investigator funds may also be used to provide post-doctoral research experience for clinician and non-clinician scientists with little or no research experience. Only mentors who are senior principal investigators of VA R&D non-mentored, national peer reviewed research awards or senior investigators at VA Centers of Excellence can provide supervision for Associate Investigators.

Eligibility: Applicants may hold M.D., D.D.S., or Ph.D. degrees. Applicants who hold an M.D. or D.D.S. degree must have completed their residency, clinical specialty, or sub-specialty training within the past two years. Ph.D.s must have received their degree within four years of application and must have been engaged in post-doctoral research activities during that period.

Duration: Participants may be approved for an appointment term of up to two years, with a possible extension of one or two years. The proposed appointment period may not exceed the award period of the mentor's funded project and in no

circumstances may exceed four years. Upon successful completion of this program, candidates are expected to apply for HSR&D Career Development or Merit Review awards.

Salary and Support: Associate Investigator appointments are considered time-limited appointments. Salaries are determined locally, but may not exceed the level for Intermediate Grade Step 1 (GS-13) for Title 38 physicians and dentists. Associate Investigators are excluded from all elements of physicians' and dentists' special pay.

Non-clinician Ph.D. applicants may be appointed under Title 5. Grade determinations are determined locally, but appointments may not be made above the level of GS-11.

Title 38 and Title 5 employees are required to meet the VA and federal appointment hiring and citizenship requirements as applicable. During the appointment period, Associate Investigators are not eligible to receive other VA research funding.

Research Career Development

Purpose: To provide time, salary, and research support to fully trained clinician-investigators who are entering or have recently entered a research career, for a period of concentrated health services research activity. The goal for awardees at this level is to acquire sufficient proficiency to compete for HSR&D merit review funding and/or an Advanced Research Career Development award.

Eligibility: Applicants must have completed clinical training, be board-certified, not be more than five years beyond completion of their last clinical training or fellow-

ship, and may have five years or less of post-doctoral research training. An appropriate academic appointment for applicants is the instructor level.

Duration: These awards are for three years and are not renewable, but awardees may apply for the Advanced Research Career Development award at the end of their award period.

Salary and Support: All appointments are on a temporary, full-time basis as time-limited appointments, unless the awardee already holds a career appointment. In addition, all appointments are subject to applicable qualification requirements. If the awardee is serving under a Title 38 appointment, written notification must be provided of this change in employment status, protection and benefits.

Grade determination for Title 38 and Title 5 awardees are determined locally.

Physician and dentist awardees are authorized to receive all components of special pay for which they are eligible.

Title 38 and Title 5 employees are required to meet applicable VA and federal appointment hiring requirements. Documentation of an applicant's eligibility for VA employment must be provided with the Letter of Intent. The employment application process should be coordinated with the local Human Resource Management office to assure that applicants meet VA appointment regulations. The associate chief of staff for R&D, or responsible VHA facility management official, is responsible for ensuring that current employees are converted to the applicable appointment authority upon receiving a Career Development award.

If an awardee does not have at

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Profiles in Career Development: Building a Future in Health Services Research

Since its launch in 1990, HSR&D's Career Development Program has been a success story—or, rather, a series of success stories as reflected by the accomplishments of all of our Career Development awardees. Following are brief profiles of six awardees, to provide a sense of the program's breadth and depth.

David Asch

For David A. Asch, M.D., M.B.A., the HSR&D Career Development Award could not have come at a better time. In 1994, when Dr. Asch began receiving the award, he was an associate scholar at the University of Pennsylvania's (UP) Center for Clinical Epidemiology and



Biostatistics, as well as a fellow at the UP's Center for Bioethics and Institute on Aging and just a few years into his appointment as an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania (UP). He was also chief of general internal medicine at the VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Philadelphia.

"I was just beginning to concentrate and focus my research interests in a particular area, of understanding how patients and clinicians make medical decisions," Dr. Asch recalls. "I was in a very good environment, with a lot of supportive and experienced senior colleagues to help me along, but I needed the funding that would give me the time to make the best use of that environment."

In addition, he says, "because my area of research interest was relatively unusual, it was even harder for me to identify more traditional sources of funding." Then again, he notes wryly, "when you're trying to get funding, it always seems hard."

Currently, Dr. Asch is executive director of the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics at UP. He is also the Robert D. Eilers associate professor of medicine and health care management and economics at UP. His work in medical decision-making, medical ethics, and health economics has been widely published. He continues to do his clinical work at the Philadelphia VAMC, and the VA remains the locus of his career.

The Career Development Award, Dr. Asch says, "was probably the most defining impact on my work ... I can't imagine what would have happened if I hadn't gotten it. It really made a huge difference."

Jennifer Daley

For Jennifer Daley, M.D., receiving the HSR&D Senior Career Development Award was a life-changing experience. Without it, Dr. Daley says, she would not have nearly as much time to devote to her highly regarded research in quality measurement and improvement. "It made an enormous contribution to my development as a researcher and a professional," she says.



Dr. Daley received the award from 1990 to 1996, during which time she was associate director and then director of HSR&D at the Brockton-West Roxbury VA Medical Center (VAMC). Her research and quality improvement activities focused on access to care, patient satisfaction, utilization and outcomes in ischemic heart disease, and the development of a major system for measuring and improving surgical outcomes, the VA National Surgical Quality Improvement Program, which she continues to lead.

When she received the award, Dr. Daley had been working in the quality improvement field for about five years. Although it was an active area of research and investigation, it was also quite competitive and funding was not always readily available, she recalls.

"The Career Development Award gives you time to focus on developing your research," she says. "I never would have had this opportunity without the VA."

Dr. Daley is also an attending physician at the Brockton-West Roxbury VAMC and a member of the committee that reviews applications for the Career Development Award Program. "I love veterans and I love caring for them," Dr. Daley says. "I still feel like I want to give back to the VA." In addition to her work in the VA, Dr. Daley is currently the director of the center for Health System Design and Evaluation at Massachusetts General Hospital and Partners HealthCare System.

She says she continues to be very enthusiastic about the Career Development Award Program. "It is an unparalleled program for developing great HSR&D investigators, and a wonderful place for nurturing junior-level investigators."

Susan Hedrick

Susan C. Hedrick, Ph.D., received the first-ever HSR&D Associate Research Career Scientist Award in 1991. For Dr. Hedrick, the award was an honor of great significance. "The award was important to me as a vote of confidence in my work," she says. "It helped support my choice of a career in the VA, rather than elsewhere."



Dr. Hedrick is associate director of the Northwest HSR&D Center of Excellence in Seattle, WA, which she joined in 1983. Her longstanding research focus is the cost-effectiveness of interventions designed to improve care for people with chronic illness. She has done considerable work on the cost-effectiveness of community-based long-term care, including home health and adult day health care.

Currently, Dr. Hedrick is principal investigator for an HSR&D-funded randomized trial on the cost-effectiveness of patient, provider, and organizational interventions for treatment of depression in primary care. The study is assessing the effect of integrated team care versus consult-liaison care on symptom severity, quality of life, satisfaction with care, and utilization and costs of care. She is also leading an evaluation of the state of Washington's community-based residential care programs.

Dr. Hedrick says her career at VA has been rewarding, not only because she has been able to pursue her research interests, but she has also enjoyed the opportunities for mentoring other health services researchers in VA.

VA, says Dr. Hedrick, "is an incredibly rich environment in which to do health services research. I've never regretted my choice of the VA as the site for my career, and receiving the Career Development Award helped support that decision."

Rudolf Moos

Rudolf H. Moos, Ph.D., already had an established track record in health services research when he first received the HSR&D Research Career Scientist Award in 1991. Now, the recent renewal of Dr. Moos' award is helping him take his research in new directions. "It allows me to be a little bolder and to do research that may have a longer-term payoff, rather than an immediate payoff," he notes.



Dr. Moos currently serves as director of HSR&D's Center for Health Care Evaluation and the Program Evaluation and Resource Center. In a career spanning more than 35 years, he has worked to improve the lives of veterans affected by substance abuse and psychiatric disorders. Last year, he became the first recipient of

the Under Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Services Research.

With the support now provided by the Research Career Scientist Award, Dr. Moos is pursuing three research endeavors. The first involves developing measures of the structure, process, and quality of psychiatric and substance abuse care and using them to evaluate program implementation and treatment outcomes. The second set of projects is comparing 12-step, cognitive-behavioral, and eclectic programs on substance abuse and evaluating the role of community residential and outpatient mental health care services on substance abuse treatment outcomes. The third set of projects focuses on extra-treatment factors, such as patients' life stressors and social resources, and their connections with treatment service use and outcomes.

Dr. Moos says the award helps researchers invest in their careers and focus on areas of interest they might not otherwise have sufficient protected time for. "The award allows you to hone your expertise and, I believe, really make more major contributions to research," he says. In addition, the award has afforded him more time to mentor other health services researchers in VA – an experience Dr. Moos believes has been beneficial all around.

Alan Garber

Receiving the HSR&D Senior Research Career Development Award was an important milestone for Alan M. Garber, M.D., Ph.D. At the VA, Dr. Garber is the associate director of the HSR&D Center for Health Care Evaluation in Palo Alto. He is also director of both the Center for Primary Care and Outcomes Research and the Center for Health Policy at Stanford University. Much of the research that enabled him to start those programs, he says, was a direct outgrowth of work he did while he received the HSR&D award from 1991 to 1997.



"It was a very formative period of my career," he recalls. Dr. Garber started at Stanford in 1986 as an assistant professor, becoming an associate professor in 1993. "By giving me the time I needed, the Career Development Award allowed me to focus my efforts more on developing research," he says.

For example, Dr. Garber did substantial work investigating the role of cholesterol screening as a method for preventing coronary heart disease. Despite his commitment to this area of research, funding from conventional sources was difficult. "The Career Development Award is unique as a funding source, in that it gives you the freedom to do projects before you have external funding for them," he notes.

Dr. Garber subsequently became involved in helping the American College of Physicians develop guidelines for cholesterol screening. He also chairs the Medical

and Surgical Procedures Panel of the Health Care Financing Administration's Medicare Coverage Advisory Committee.

In addition to the financial support and recognition that the Career Development Award provides, it also fosters important mentoring relationships, Dr. Garber notes. In particular, he says, he benefited from the mentoring he received from Dr. Rudolf Moos, a recipient of the HSR&D Research Career Scientist Award.

"The Career Development Award Program made it clear to me that VA is a great place to build a career in health services research," Dr. Garber says. "Like every other Career Development awardee, I am genuinely grateful. It really made a difference."

Seth Landefeld

Charles Seth Landefeld, M.D., attributes much of his creativity as a researcher to the HSR&D Career Development Award he received from 1993 to 1997. "The Career Development Award, for me, made the difference between prosaic research and creative, highly productive research on improving patient care," Dr. Landefeld says. "The program makes the difference between doing a good job and doing a great job and developing your potential."

Dr. Landefeld is currently chief of geriatrics at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), and assistant chief of staff for geriatrics and extended care at the San Francisco VA Medical Center.



He is also professor of medicine and epidemiology and biostatistics at UCSF.

When Dr. Landefeld received the award, he was an associate professor of medicine at Case Western Reserve University. He had already started work in what was to be his major area of research, improving care for frail elderly populations. The Career Development Award supported him while he was investigating ways to improve the use of anticoagulant therapy in elderly patients, and developing and testing an intervention to improve functional and quality-of-life outcomes in hospitalized elderly patients.

In addition to supporting his time as a researcher, Dr. Landefeld says the award also supported time spent developing exciting and important mentoring relationships. "It gave me time to spend with people, both senior colleagues and junior colleagues, to develop ideas and leverage our work," he says. "The system of faculty support does not pay for mentoring or building research capacity at all, but the Career Development Award gave me the flexibility to engage in these critical activities."

Receiving the award also cemented his ties with the VA. "I would not have been in the VA except for the Career Development Award," Dr. Landefeld says. As it turns out, the VA is an ideal research environment for him. "The VA is the only health care system in the country that formally supports geriatrics and aging care," Dr. Landefeld notes.

Dr. Landefeld gives the VA high praise for being out front in developing a physician workforce in health services research. "There is very little out there that invests in you as an investigator," he says. "The Career Development Awards are pure gold in that they're investing in you."

Invited Commentary

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Most awardees by their second-year in the program have secured funding as principal investigators on their own HSR&D projects. In addition to developing proposals and competing for funding, awardees are actively publishing in leading journals. Of the 17 investigators who have graduated from the program since 1990, 15 remain associated with VA and continue to contribute to the program by mentoring and training new awardees or by serving on Career Development or other HSR&D review panels. Several Career

Development graduates have assumed major leadership roles and three are directors of HSR&D Centers of Excellence. Others are directors or associate directors of other research or clinical centers or hold positions of leadership, such as service or section chief, at their local hospital.

As long as it continues to fulfill its three primary goals, the Career Development Program will remain one of VA's most valuable investment mechanisms. In return for its investment, VA receives a diverse pool of young investigators on the forefront of scientific knowledge. Their contributions help advance the overall mission of VA, and many former awardees will go on to represent VA as nationally or inter-

nationally recognized experts.

An investment in Career Development is an investment in VA's future. By providing sufficient time and a supportive environment, VA ensures that it will continue to attract the most academically and clinically talented health services researchers in the country.

An Overview

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least \$10,000 per year in VA or non-VA research funding for supplies, equipment, and staff support, supplemental funds may be requested to bring his or her total research funding to \$10,000 per year.

Work Site: Work must be conducted in the same physical location at the VA (or in VA-approved space) as the awardee's primary mentor, or near the primary mentor, except in unusual circumstances.

Advanced Research Career Development

Purpose: To provide time, salary, and research support for a period of concentrated health services research activity to fully trained clinician-investigators who have some research experience but need additional guided research experience to become fully independent. During the award period, awardees are expected to compete for peer-reviewed research funds. The goal for awardees at this level is to acquire sufficient proficiency to compete for HSR&D merit review funding by the end of their award.

Eligibility: Applicants are encouraged to play a major role in a VA peer-reviewed and funded research project or other funded national peer-reviewed project at the time of application. Applicants must have at least three years of post-doctoral research experience and are expected to have had at least one first-authored peer-reviewed publication in the area of their proposed research. An appropriate academic appointment for applicants is at the assistant professor level.

Duration: This award is for three years and is non-renewable.

Salary and Support: All appointments are on a temporary, full-time basis as time-limited appointments, unless the awardee already holds a

career appointment, and are subject to applicable qualification requirements. If the awardee is serving under a Title 38 appointment, written notification must be provided of this change in employment status, protection, and benefits.

Grade determination for Title 38 and Title 5 awardees is determined locally.

Physician and dentist awardees are authorized to receive all components of special pay for which they are eligible.

Title 38 and Title 5 employees are required to meet the applicable VA and federal appointment hiring requirements. Documentation of an applicant's eligibility for VA employment must be provided with Letter of Intent. The employment application process should be coordinated with the local Human Resource Management office to assure that applicants meet VA appointment regulations. The associate chief of staff for R&D, or responsible VHA facility management official, is responsible for ensuring that current employees are converted to the applicable appointment authority upon receiving a Career Development award.

If an awardee does not have at least \$20,000 per year in VA or non-VA research funding for supplies, equipment, and staff support, supplemental funds may be requested to bring total research funding to \$20,000 per year.

Work Site: Applicants must conduct their research in a VA facility. The awardee's primary laboratory must be located at his or her local VA facility, and the research program of the awardee should enrich the overall research program of the sponsoring medical center.

Career Development Enhancement

Purpose: To support established clinician scientists who want time to explore opportunities and obtain training in new areas of research, especially in areas of importance to VA's mission.

Eligibility: Applicants must have at least six years of VA employment. A sponsor who will facilitate and make training available to the applicant is required. The applicant must be a principal investigator on an ongoing VA peer-reviewed and funded research program.

Duration: This award, in conjunction with educational leave granted by the applicant's VA medical center, provides up to one year of sabbatical time and salary support. It is not renewable.

Salary and Support: This award provides salary, including fringe benefits, for up to six months, which must be matched, both in time and salary, from educational leave granted by the applicant's VA medical center. Since educational leave has been decentralized, awards are contingent on decisions made at the local VA medical center. Applicants are required to submit documentation from their local medical center indicating contingent approval of educational leave in time and amount. Awardees must devote 100 percent of their time to research.

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How To Contact Local Training Program Sites

Following is a list of contacts for local training program sites, including the name, phone number, email address, and the program(s) approved for each site. The four programs are: Pre-Doctoral Training; Post-Doctoral Training, Associated Health, Ph.D.s; Post-Doctoral Training, Associated Health, M.D.s; and Post-Doctoral Training, Medical Informatics (MI).

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