



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH**  
**WASHINGTON DC 20420**

**FEB 07 2007**

Dear Deans:

As you know, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to serving the needs of veterans. As part of our research and education missions, we maintain important partnerships with the academic and scientific community, including 107 medical schools; other Federal agencies; and many other sponsors of research.

Our commitment to veterans also encompasses the need to protect their sensitive personal and health-related information. All of us involved with VA are responsible for protecting our veterans' confidentiality and personal information in order to conduct the high quality research that has helped to define world-class VA care.

Recent high profile sentinel events have highlighted the types of risks that are inherent in this age of portable media and electronic information. To respond to concerns raised by these events, the Veterans Health Administration and the Office of Information and Technology, announced on February 6, 2007, a new initiative called "Certification by Principal Investigators: Security Requirements for VA Research Information." This note is to inform you of the process and enlist your help and that of your IT establishment to ensure the safety of joint databases that include veteran information.

Our initiative consists of a process of IT security certification, including a project-by-project checklist and a new training requirement for all VA research staff. The focus of this initiative will be on VA research data storage and security. It will include ensuring that each VA facility performing research has appropriate policies and procedures in place for research data storage and security, and that those policies and procedures are being implemented. The initiative covers all VA research, regardless of funding source, including research done in collaboration with the academic community, Federal agencies, and other research sponsors. The standards for securing research data on veterans will apply to all sites where such data are stored, as well as to portable media such as laptops and removable drives, regardless of whether VA or non-VA owned.

Over the coming weeks, the research administrative and information technology staff at each VA medical center will be reviewing projects to ensure all applicable security standards are in place. Please be assured that VA is fully committed to making research data secure, as well as continuing the collaborative research that has been a hallmark of VA's academic mission.

We ask you to work together with your VA colleagues toward assuring the security of IT information, in particular where there are collaborative databases and other joint IT efforts between universities and VA facilities. It is also likely that you will have questions about how this new initiative may impact your medical institution. For those specific answers, we would direct you to the VA Research Office at your location, and we encourage you to discuss these matters at your local or network VA Academic Affairs Council meetings. We also direct you to our web site, [www.research.va.gov](http://www.research.va.gov) which has a cyber security link with relevant documents and information.

IT security is a crucial issue for all of us and we know that it will be a challenge in the coming weeks. Thank you again for your cooperation in making the affiliations between VA and universities so important and successful.

Sincerely yours,

*Michael J. Kussman, M.D.*

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP  
Acting Under Secretary for Health

*Joel Kupersmith*

Joel Kupersmith, MD  
Chief Research and Development Officer