

Department of
Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: **SEP 23 2005**

From: Chief Research and Development Officer (12)

Subj: Financial Conflicts of Interest in Research

To: ACOSR

Thru: Principal DUSH ^R
Acting DUSHOM ^{AF}

1. The mission of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Research and Development is to discover knowledge, develop VA researchers and health care leaders, and create innovations that advance health care for our veterans and the nation. In order to fulfill this mission, VHA must preserve public trust in the integrity and quality of research carried out by its investigators and in its facilities. One way to maintain public trust and safeguard the integrity and quality of VA research is to ensure that VA investigators avoid actual or perceived financial conflicts of interest in the research they conduct.
2. Since February 1, 2005 when Handbook 1200.13 "Financial Conflicts of Interest in Research" was rescinded, VHA has not had a specific policy and guidance document addressing financial conflicts of interest in research. I hope that a VHA policy on financial conflicts of interest in research will be issued in the near future. Until such a research-specific policy is issued, I am providing the following information to remind all VHA employees conducting VA research of their current obligations under existing Federal laws and regulations related to financial conflicts of interest.
3. Like all VA employees, VHA employees conducting VA research approved by the Research and Development committee, must comply with the Federal criminal code and the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Executive Branch Employees. The obligation to follow applicable ethics laws and regulations also applies to without compensation (WOC) employees conducting VA research. Failure to follow these ethics laws and regulations can have serious consequences. If criminal ethics statutes are violated, civil fines and imprisonment can result. Severe administrative disciplinary action can result from violating ethics regulations, including suspension from employment, termination of employment, and other administrative punishment. Further, even seemingly minor violations may impact perceptions of the research program's integrity and credibility.

Page 2.

4. VA researchers with outside consulting, employment, or royalty payment opportunities should discuss those potential opportunities with a VA agency ethics official before entering into any agreements or receiving any payments. To get help on these matters, employees can contact either the local Regional Counsel, or ethics officials in the VACO (VA Central Office) Office of General Counsel. The ethics staff in VACO can be reached by phone at (202) 273-6334 / 6335, by FAX at (202) 273-6403, or by mail at the following address:

Office of the General Counsel (023)
VA Central Office
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

5. The Office of General Counsel maintains a web site with information on ethics at <http://vawww.gc.va.gov/ethics/>. For further information on the subject, a web-based course addressing financial conflict of interest in research is available at www.ResearchTraining.org.

6. I strongly encourage all research investigators and research staff to access the Office of General Counsel's web-site and review the available information. This web-site contains a number of important documents including a 23 page booklet on ethics entitled "Take the High Road". This booklet is easy to read and contains an overview of eight of the standards of conduct that must be followed such as conflicting financial interest, impartiality in performing public duties and misuse of positions.

7. Please share this information with all your staff. My office will be available to assist you in contacting Regional Counsel or the VA Central Office, Office of General Counsel, if you have questions concerning these regulatory requirements. If you have other questions concerning related to the planned Financial Conflict of Interest in Research policy, please contact Brenda Cuccherini, PhD at (202) 254-0277 or by e-mail at Brenda.Cuccherini@VA.gov.


Joel Kupersmith, MD

cc: Network Directors (VISN 1-23)
VA Medical Centers