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## REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook announces programmatic changes to the Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Centers in the RR&D Service.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** Establishes new policy and procedures for the VHA RR&D Center program.
- 3. RELATED DOCUMENTS:** VHA Directive 1203.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of RR&D is responsible for the contents of this Handbook.
- 5. RESCISSION:** This VHA Handbook rescinds VHA Manual M-3, Part IV Chapter 2, paragraph 2.03.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of March 2007.

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## REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes procedures for, and defines responsibilities of, Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Centers.

### 2. BACKGROUND

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) RR&D Centers are intended to be a resource, first, for the veterans served by VA, especially by the host VA health care facility and, second, for the rehabilitation community at large. They are expected to provide cutting edge solutions to the issues of chronic impairment. It is anticipated that Centers will establish and cultivate a community of VA clinical scientists and scholars within the VA health care system for the purpose of pursuing specific research objectives in accordance with a well reasoned 5-year plan. Centers are to develop an integrated thematic research core as a unifying focus of research activities. In the service of these goals, the RR&D Centers program provides relatively stable core funding, enabling a critical mass of investigators to leverage that support and develop long-term programs of research. Each RR&D Center is selected competitively, based upon scientific review and the specific criteria and procedures outlined in the solicitation for proposals. RR&D Centers are expected to:

- a. Become nationally recognized "Centers of Excellence" in a selected area of research relevant to veterans with disabilities.
- b. Successfully leverage core support funding through nationally competed and scientifically reviewed funding vehicles, including VA investigator-initiated programs, Federal granting agency programs, private foundation awards, and collaborations with commercial partners.
- c. Mentor and support young investigators, both clinician and non-clinician scientists, through pre- and post-doctoral programs and recruit them into VA.
- d. Nurture a strong interface with the appropriate VA medical facility clinical services engaged in rehabilitation, long-term management of impairment, and overall quality of life issues.
- e. Maintain collaborative partnerships of mutual benefit to VA, the VA health care facility, and the supporting community institutions (e.g., schools of medicine, allied health sciences and/or engineering as applicable to research focus).
- f. Facilitate effective information dissemination for a broad spectrum of audiences.
- g. Foster the integration of research findings into clinical practice throughout the health care delivery system.

h. Actively participate in the national consortium of VA RR&D Centers to strengthen natural collaborative bonds and advance VA RR&D in the scientific community and national consciousness.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

a. **Site.** VA RR&D Centers must be housed within the VA health care facility. Space needs to be in clear juxtaposition to related clinical care. It needs to be evident to veterans receiving care that research related to their needs is being carried out and that they have access to state-of-the-art care resulting from such research.

b. **Award Duration.** VA RR&D Center awards are for a period of 5 years. Each award will be re-competed in its fourth year. In addition, Centers are reviewed annually and are subject to probation status in cases of deficient performance (see subpar. 4b(5)).

c. **Emphasis Areas.** VA RR&D emphasizes and funds research in the following broad priority areas: prosthetics, orthotics and orthopedic rehabilitation; neurological dysfunction and spinal cord injury restoration and rehabilitation; geriatric rehabilitation; visual and hearing impairment rehabilitation, rehabilitation engineering, and rehabilitation outcomes.

d. **Annual Funding.** RR&D Center awards of core funding will be up to \$750,000 annually.

e. **Facility Eligibility.** Any VA health care facility (or consortium of VA health care facilities) with significant rehabilitation research capacity and with well-established academic partnerships is encouraged to apply. Consortium applicants must identify a lead site with a well-established academic partnership. Organizational relationships and responsibilities of consortia are to be clearly delineated.

f. **Leadership.** Each Center will have a Director and Associate Director for Research, each with a doctoral degree and at least a 5/8 VA appointment. Either the Director or Associate Director must be a clinician. Eligibility must be established prior to submission of the proposal. The medical and scientific leadership team is expected to:

(1) Identify research goals and objectives within a given focus area and direct research plans towards achievement of specified goals and objectives. Research plans need to include collaborative activities;

(2) Create a 5-year program plan for research with specific outcomes aimed at discovering new knowledge, processes and assistive technology that directly influence clinical practice;

(3) Achieve maximal administrative efficiencies, control and reporting capabilities, project monitoring, and leveraging of limited core support funds at the local and the national levels;

(4) Support the growth and enhancement of a vigorous and creative "learning environment;"

(5) Maintain information dissemination activities that promote findings from VA RR&D Centers.

#### 4. PROCESS

a. **Requirements.** Requests for RR&D Center proposals will be issued via a VHA numbered administrative issue. The issue will contain instructions for submitting proposals, proposal deadlines, Letter of Intent requirements (if applicable), notification of current Center emphasis areas and areas of desired emphasis, and any pertinent funding information. All applications must be reviewed by the appropriate R&D Committees and appropriate Human Subject, Animal Safety and Bio-Safety Subcommittees. Proposals will be scientifically reviewed to determine relevance of the proposed research to the veteran population, capability of applicant to meet intended outcome of proposed research program, potential contribution of proposed research to the field of rehabilitation, long-term management of impairment, and overall quality of life issues for veterans with disabilities.

b. **Criteria for Review and Evaluation.** Criteria for review and evaluation are:

(1) **Strength of Proposed Research Focus.** This includes the:

- (a) Relevance to veteran population;
- (b) Relationship of proposed research activities to announced research focus;
- (c) Potential of proposed research to produce new and useful information;
- (d) Clarity and achievability of research plan, and
- (e) Contribution to overall VA RR&D portfolio.

(2) **Effectiveness of Operating Plan.** This includes the:

- (a) Achievability of intended research outcomes;
- (b) Workability of proposed collaborations and evidence of their benefit to VA;
- (c) Feasibility of evaluation and quality assurance methods;
- (d) Sufficient coverage of all required disciplines;
- (e) Ability to build research capacity within VA; and
- (f) Effectiveness of plan to disseminate research findings.

(3) **Adequacy of Resources.** This includes the:

(a) Scientific strength of current VA Research and Development (R&D) Program, especially in rehabilitation research;

(b) Vitality of rehabilitation clinical base within VA medical facility;

(c) Support and commitment of VA medical facility(s) and cited affiliations;

(d) Demonstrated scientific leadership of key personnel at VA;

(e) Evidence of VA-based core of investigators, and;

(f) Adequacy of VA facilities and equipment.

(4) **Budget and Cost Effectiveness.** This includes the:

(a) Ability to support program activities;

(b) Reasonableness of costs, and;

(c) Appropriateness and detail of subcontract budget (if required).

(5) **Performance Measures.** Performance measures for RR&D Centers will be addressed and reviewed through an annual report. To guide the Centers in meeting RR&D's mission of discovering new knowledge to advance optimal rehabilitative health care for veterans with disabilities, the following performance measures have been developed:

(a) Impact on Clinical Care. VA supports an applied clinical research program intended to address the questions raised in the patient care environment. All researchers need to be connected in a relevant way to their respective medical center's clinical care. Centers will be expected to demonstrate educational dissemination into the patient care arena. At a local level, investigators need to actively participate in grand rounds and like activities, and provide documentation of these activities. The Center staff needs to produce at least five papers in clinical publications and five presentations to a national clinical audience per year. Participation in clinical trials is encouraged and needs to be documented. Weight: 25 percent

(b) Leveraged Funding. VA RR&D Centers are expected to leverage a minimum of \$5 of additional research funding for each \$1 of Core funding. Additional funds may include indirect costs, as well as well-justified, non-research items such as education. At least 10 percent of leveraged funds need to be from sources beyond VA RR&D. It is anticipated that this will not only serve to enhance the investment VA RR&D makes in its Centers, but will strengthen the RR&D Center's position as key players in the national arena. Weight: 20 percent

(c) Information Dissemination. Centers need to actively disseminate findings via peer reviewed publications and presentations with significant citations within the literature. Each Center staff should meet an annual goal of twenty peer reviewed publications and presentations. Sponsored conferences and workshops, consumer education forums, transferred technology

(commercialized and patented), and useful prototypes established through the Center's research also demonstrate a Center's productivity. Weight: 20 percent

(d) Capacity Building. Part of the RR&D Center program's purpose is to support the growth and training of young investigators. To that end, Centers are expected to have an active pre- and post-doctoral program. Programs within VA and from other agencies need to be accessed to support at least ten junior investigators and/or students in research career tracks each year. Weight: 15 percent

(e) Service to VA and professional community at the National and Local Level. Center personnel need to actively participate on VA committees and task forces within the local VA health care community and at the national level. In addition, personnel are expected to influence their field and be VA ambassadors within their professional organizations by serving on boards and chairing meetings, and within their professional community through activities such as serving on review committees, special study sections, and advisory boards. Weight: 10 percent

(f) Research Collaborations. Each Center should engage in collaborative activities with other Centers, VA medical facilities, and other funded programs in pursuit of the same goals. Weight: 10 percent

(6) **Annual Report**. A table of contents needs to clearly identify the sections of the report. Ten copies of the annual report covering the previous fiscal year are required by January 15<sup>th</sup> of each year. One copy is to be single-sided and reproducible. Preferred font is Times New Roman, 12 point. The following items are required in the annual report:

(a) A One to Three Page Summary of Year. This should include the mission, goals and objectives reached, future goals and objectives, and plan adjustments, if any.

(b) A Personnel Listing. A personnel listing including name, title, salary, and percent of salaried VA personnel is required.

(c) Clinical Interface. Clinical presentations, community seminars, grand rounds, or like activities participated in by Center personnel need to be listed. The Center's clinical interface needs to be outlined in a narrative not to exceed two pages. Of particular interest would be any clinical practices which have been validated through the Center's research and have now become part of clinical rehabilitation strategy. Identify whether this is on a local, national, or international level, and include approximate dates;

(7) **Project Reports (VA, Other Federal, and Private Funding)**. Project Reports are to include:

(a) Project Submissions and/or Approvals. Brief description, including project timeframe and total requested funding; a maximum of one page per project;

(b) On-going Funded Projects. Description, with progress noted, including project timeframe and total funding; a maximum of one page per project;

(c) Milestones. Two (at least) milestones, findings, products of impact resulting from studies; and a maximum of one page per milestone.

(8) **Capacity Building**. List name, time period of award and/or fellowship, dollars associated with an award and/or fellowship, and area of study. Use a maximum of three lines for each of the following:

- (a) Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) Pre-doctoral Fellows;
- (b) Associate Investigator Awardees;
- (c) Career Development Awardees;
- (d) Research Career Scientists; and
- (e) Other Research Fellow Programs.

(9) **Information Dissemination**. There is a limit of one-half page per each item:

- (a) Publications in Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development (JRRD);
- (b) Other publications and/or presentations;
- (c) Sponsored conferences and workshops;
- (d) Transferred (commercialized and/or patented) technology;
- (e) Data ready for JRRD publication; and
- (f) Research collaborations and/or clinical trials. List project titles, institutions and/or locations, and co-investigators.