Department of Veterans Affairs **VHA HANDBOOK 1203.3**
Veterans Health Administration
Washington, DC 20420 **April 16, 2002**

RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM AND AWARDS

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook announces programmatic changes to the Research Career Scientist Program in the Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Service.

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES: Establishes new policy and procedures for the VHA RR&D 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 RESCISSION: VHA Notice 98-02 dated April 27, 1998, is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This document is scheduled for re-certification on or before the last working date of April 2007.

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Under Secretary for Health

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RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM AND AWARDS

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides policy and guidance related to the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program.

2. SCOPE

The RR&D RCS program is a highly selective program designed to sustain and enhance the research careers of established non-clinician scientists who have demonstrated commitment to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rehabilitation research. Salary support for non-clinician scientists historically has been available through a variety of mechanisms, including the Merit Review and the RCS programs. The RR&D RCS program is intended to provide recognition and salary support for outstanding non-clinician scientists in VA. Non-clinician scientists who are either principal or co-principal investigators on VA-funded peer-reviewed research programs and salaried by VA RR&D are eligible to apply for the RCS award (see VHA Handbook 1200.15). VA clinicians that have switched from a clinical career track to a research track may also be eligible for the RCS program. Non-clinician scientists contribute to VA research programs not only because of their direct contributions to scientific knowledge, but because they serve as mentors for clinician and non-clinician investigators. They furnish an important expertise that complements the research programs of the clinical staff.

3. PROCEDURES

a. **Award Levels.** The RCS designation comprises two levels: RCS (a 5-year award), and Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS) (a 7-year award).

b. **Qualifications.** The title, RCS, may be awarded to established, independent investigators who have distinguished themselves through scientific achievement, and who contribute to the VA research program through participation in research activities including: training and mentoring junior VA scientists; functioning as a resource for the research community; serving on VA research or other committees; and collaborating with clinician investigators. A limited number of these prestigious awards are available for RR&D Service. Applicants must be in receipt of VA research funding or other national peer-reviewed research support. Academic appointments should be at the Associate Professor or Professor level.

c. **RCS Award.** Nationally recognized VA scientists with a minimum of 6 years of national peer-reviewed research support may apply for the RR&D RCS award. Initial awards are for 5 years and are renewable indefinitely, subject to review by the RR&D RCS Committee. Renewal is contingent on availability of funds and is dependent on continuation of peer-reviewed research support and participation in research activities such as: training and mentoring junior VA scientists;

functioning as a resource for the research community; serving on VA research or other committees; and collaborating with clinician investigators. RCSs may apply for award renewal after completion of the third year of each 5-year award. RCS awardees may apply for a SRCS after completion of their fifth RCS year.

d. **SRCS Award.** Outstanding VA scientists who are recognized internationally as leaders in their field may apply for the RR&D SRCS award. These senior level awards are for 7 years and are renewable indefinitely, subject to committee review. Renewal is contingent on availability of funds and is dependent on continuation of peer-reviewed research support and participation in research activities such as: training and mentoring junior VA scientists; functioning as a resource for the research community; serving on VA research or other committees; and collaborating with clinician investigators. SRCS may apply for award renewal after completion of the fourth year of each 7-year award.

e. **Position Classification.** RCS and SRCS are eligible to receive VA salary support, as long as they continue to secure research funding, and bridge support, if needed, to carry them between funded projects. However, it should be noted that position classification is a separate process from the RCS or SRCS application, and a separate application is required for position classification or promotion (see VHA Handbook 1200.3) Applications for General Schedule (GS)-14 or GS-15 civil service appointments, if applicable, must be included with the RCS or SRCS application. Some VA or university committee and teaching responsibilities are considered appropriate for a fully VA-supported RCS or SRCS. However, VA salary support for the RCS or SRCS award will be reduced commensurate with the reduction of research time available if the awardee holds significant administrative positions at VA or a university.

f. **Review.** Qualified applicants for RCS and SRCS awards are evaluated by the RR&D RCS Committee in accordance with the following criteria:

(1) A record of successful past and current VA research support and/or successful competition as a principal investigator for significant, extra-VA research funding from a national program that utilizes a level of scientific peer review equivalent to that of VA.

(2) A minimum of 5/8 time research-related commitment to VA.

(3) Publications in widely-read refereed journals, particularly as the first or senior author.

(4) Invitations to speak or chair sessions at national or international meetings.

(5) Service on national scientific advisory or peer review committees or editorial boards of scientific journals.

(6) Recognition by peers as a leader in a research field with relevance to VA rehabilitation.

(7) Interaction with clinicians and/or managers in support of VA patient care programs.

(8) An active role in the education and formal training of young scientists.

g. **Initial Applications.** Applications must be received by RR&D Service by dates listed on website http://www1.va.gov/resdev/funding/unified-cal04.cfm (see App. A for specific instructions). ***NOTE:*** *Applications for GS-14 or GS-15 civil service appointments, if applicable, must be included with the RCS or SRCS application (see VHA Handbook 1200.3).*

h. **Applications for Renewal of Awards.** Applications for renewal of RCS or SRCS awards must be received by the deadlines listed on http://www1.va.gov/resdev/funding/unified-cal04.cfm for the first review cycle following completion of the third or fourth year of the award for RCS and SRCS awardees, respectively. Applications for renewal of RCS or SRCS awards follow the same format as in the Initial Application (see App. A).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST AWARDS

1. REQUIREMENTS

Application for a Career Scientist award does not require a Letter of Intent (LOI). The applicant submits a full application through the sponsoring Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility to Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D). Applicants need to specify whether they are applying for an award at the Research Career Scientist (RCS) or Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS) level. No VA facility may submit more than two Career Scientist applications in a fiscal year.

2. FORMAT

Proposals should consist of single-spaced typed pages, with minimum 1-inch margins on all sides and a font no smaller than 11-point. ***NOTE:*** *Applications will be returned without review if they are not complete or do not conform to these guidelines. Responsibility for following instructions and preparing a complete and timely submission lies with the Research and Development (R&D) Office at the originating VA medical facility.*

3. CONTENT

Each proposal is to consist of the following materials:

a. A cover sheet listing the following information in the order specified:

(1) RCS nomination.

(2) Name of the VA health care facility.

(3) Name of nominee.

(4) Nominee's date of birth.

(5) VA position currently held and proposed position.

(6) Nominee's current VA employment status (in 8ths).

(7) Number of years employed by VA as a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) scientist.

(8) Nominee's current grade and step.

(9) Nominee's academic title (indicate tenure status).

(10) Location of nominee's laboratory.

(11) Statement of nominee's working relationships with other investigators and interactions at the medical center.

(12) A statement describing the research area of the nominee and its relevance to VA health care, with special reference to rehabilitation.

(13) Current VA funding (amount, title of project, role; i.e., principal or co-principal investigator) and year of last approved Merit Review or other VA research support.

(14) Current extra-VA funding (amount, title of project, source, complete grant number, years of support, and role (principal or co-principal investigator).

(15) Five letters of support. The letters should provide input on the investigator's reputation as a scientist, standing in the investigator's chosen field of research, and other factors that may be relevant to the evaluation process.

(16) Name, title, and signature of the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for R&D.

b. A letter of support from the R&D Committee.

c. A breakdown of research funding history, both VA and extra-VA, in spreadsheet format.

d. For current VA-funded research, complete the following forms:

(1) VA Form 10-1313-2, Merit Review Application - Summary Description of Program/Project;

(2) VA Form 10-1313-3, Merit Review Application - Current Funds and First Year Request for Program/Project;

(3) VA Form 10-1313-4, Merit Review Application - Estimated Expenses of Program/Project;

(4) VA Form 10-1313-7, Merit Review Application - Investigator's Total VA and Non-VA Research Support (Current and Pending); and

(5) VA Form 10-1313-8, Merit Review Application - Investigator's Total VA and Non-VA Research/Development Support.

e. For all current non-VA funded research, a budget page and an abstract.

f. Curriculum vitae.

g. Two publications chosen by the nominee as being representative of the nominee’s work.

4. MAILING INSTRUCTIONS

Submit the original and ten copies of the nomination proposal to:

Research Career Scientist Program Officer
RR&D Service (122P)
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420

5. DEADLINES

Applications must be received by dates listed on http://www1.va.gov/resdev/funding/unified-cal04.cfm.

6. INQUIRIES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Inquiries may be directed to RR&D Service, Program Analysis and Review Section (PARS) at (202) 254-0255. Please refer also to the RR&D website at www.rehab.research.va.gov