

FOVA

Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research

A coalition of national organizations committed to quality care for America's veterans

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July 22, 2008

The Honorable James B. Peake, M.D.
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable Jim Nussle
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Secretary and Director Nussle:

On behalf of the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA), we write to recommend that the Administration include in the FY 2010 budget proposal a new funding line designated for VA research infrastructure. FOVA was founded 20 years ago to ensure that America's veterans receive high-quality health care. Today, FOVA is a diverse coalition representing more than 90 national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations.

A state-of-the-art environment for research promotes excellence in science as well as teaching and patient care. It also helps VA recruit and retain the best and brightest clinician scientists that care for our nation's veterans. However, many VA facilities have run out of adequate research space. In May 2004, then-Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi approved the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission's report to upgrade and renovate VA facilities. While this panel found need for \$87 million to renovate existing research space, it was not included in the Secretary's final report.

Over the past decade, only \$50 million has been spent on VA research construction or renovation at only 24 of the 97 major VA research sites across the nation. Ventilation, electrical supply, and plumbing appear frequently on lists of needed upgrades along with space reconfiguration. In House Report 109-95 accompanying the FY 2006 VA appropriations, the House Appropriations Committee expressed concern that "equipment and facilities to support the research program may be lacking and that some mechanism is necessary to ensure the Department's research facilities remain competitive."

A significant cause of research infrastructure's neglect is that there is no direct funding line for research facilities. The VA Medical and Prosthetic Research appropriation does not include funding for construction, renovation, or maintenance of research facilities. VA researchers must rely on their local facility management to repair, upgrade, and replace research facilities and capital equipment associated with VA's research laboratories. As a result, VA research competes with other medical facility direct patient care needs (such as medical services infrastructure, capital equipment upgrades and replacements, and other maintenance needs) for funds provided under either the Major Medical Facility or Minor Construction appropriations accounts.

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In FY 2008, the VA Office of Research and Development initiated a three-year examination of all VA research infrastructure for physical condition, capacity for current research, as well as program growth and sustainability of the space to conduct research. VA has already completed a number of comprehensive site surveys and plans to conduct two surveys per month until the project's completion.

FOVA anticipates VA's analysis will validate the need for significant new funding to address the declining infrastructure of VA research facilities. To address this shortfall, FOVA recommends the Administration propose a new appropriations account in the FY 2010 budget to independently define and separate VA research infrastructure funding needs from needs related to direct VA medical care. This revision should empower VA to address research facility needs without interfering with direct care infrastructure. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The FOVA Executive Committee and the 2008 FOVA membership

Cc: Michael J. Kussman, M.D.
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Administrators of Internal Medicine
Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine
Alliance for Aging Research
Alzheimer's Association
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Academy of Pain Medicine
American Association for Dental Research
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases
American Association of Anatomists
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists

American Association of Spinal Cord Injury Nurses
American Association of Spinal Cord Injury Psychologists and Social Workers
American College of Clinical Pharmacology
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Neuropsychopharmacology
American College of Physicians
American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine
American Dental Education Association
American Dental Hygienists' Association
American Federation for Medical Research
American Gastroenterological Association
American Geriatrics Society
American Headache Society
American Heart Association
American Hospital Association
American Lung Association

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American Military Retirees Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Optometric Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Pain Society
American Paraplegia Society
American Physical Therapy Association
American Physiological Society
American Podiatric Medical Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
American Society for Bone and Mineral Research
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics
American Society of Anesthesiologists
American Society of Hematology
American Society of Nephrology
American Thoracic Society
Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International
Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology
Association of Academic Health Centers
Association of Academic Psychiatrists
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Professors of Medicine
Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of Specialty Professors
Blinded Veterans Association
Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine

Coalition for Health Services Research
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Digestive Disease National Coalition
Disabled American Veterans
Dystonia Medical Research Foundation
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Gerontological Society of America
Hepatitis Foundation International
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Foundation for Functional Gastroenterological Disorders
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Legion of Valor of the USA, Inc.
Medicine-Pediatrics Program Directors Association
Military Officers Association of America
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics
National Association for Uniformed Services
National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges
National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Pain Care Coalition
Research!America
Society for Neuroscience
Society of General Internal Medicine
The Endocrine Society
The FAIR Foundation
United Spinal Association
Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant Association
Veterans of the Vietnam War and the Veterans Coalition