

FOVA

Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research

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

Executive Committee

John M. Bradley, III

Veterans Service Organizations
Liaison
703-244-3652
jbradley@davmail.org

Charlie Clayton

Alliance for Academic
Internal Medicine
202-861-9351
cclayton@im.org

Gary Ewart

American Thoracic Society
202-296-9770
gewart@thoracic.org

Heather Kelly, Ph.D.

American Psychological
Association
202-336-5932
hkelly@apa.org

Matthew Shick

Association of American
Medical Colleges
202-862-6116
mshick@aamc.org

Paul Smedberg

American Society of Nephrology
202-659-0599
psmedberg@asn-online.org

Barbara West

National Association of Veterans'
Research and Education Foundations
301-656-5005
bwest@navref.org

www.friendsofva.org

November 12, 2010

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA), we urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to comply with congressional requests to submit a review of VA's research infrastructure. FOVA was founded over 20 years ago to ensure that America's veterans receive high-quality health care. Today, FOVA is a diverse coalition representing more than 70 national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations. FOVA works in concert with the *Independent Budget* veterans service organizations to develop recommendations for VA, the Administration, and Congress.

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. Also, ventilation, electrical supply, and plumbing appear frequently on lists of needed upgrades along with research space reconfiguration.

In House Report 109-95 accompanying 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." In the same report, the committee directed VA to conduct "a comprehensive review of its research facilities and report to the Congress on the deficiencies found and suggestions for correction of the identified deficiencies." To comply, VA initiated a comprehensive assessment of VA research infrastructure. According to an October 26, 2009, VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) report to the VA National Research Advisory Committee, preliminary results indicated "there is a clear need for research infrastructure improvements throughout the system, including many that impact on life safety."

Five years later, to prompt VA to complete its long overdue assessment, House Report 111-559 accompanying the FY 2011 VA appropriations bill directs VA to provide its final report to Congress by September 1, 2010, with details of any recent renovations or new construction. FOVA urges VA to complete this review to ensure that the Administration and Congress are well informed of the condition of VA's research infrastructure and of its funding needs throughout the FY 2012 budget process.

FOVA

The FOVA organizations are concerned that a significant cause of VA's research infrastructure 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.

Additionally, an emerging problem is that research facilities often are not an integral component of planning for new VA medical centers. Modern day research has unique power, safety, privacy and configuration requirements that should be fundamental to the new construction planning processes, not an afterthought.

Correction of the known infrastructure deficiencies should not be further delayed. Therefore, the FOVA organizations recommend: 1) prompt submission to Congress of the report it requested in 2005; 2) construction funding sufficient to address VA's five highest priority research facility construction needs as identified in its facilities assessment report; and 3) a pool of funding dedicated exclusively to renovating existing research facilities to address the current and well-documented shortfalls in research infrastructure. Further, we urge the Administration to require that research space must be an integral component of planning for every new medical center and that such space should be designed by architects experienced in research facility requirements.

Sincerely,

The Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research

Cc:

The Honorable Robert A. Petzel, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Hari Sastry
Chief, Veteran Affairs and Defense Health Branch
Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President

FOVA

Administrators of Internal Medicine
Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine
Alliance for Aging Research
American Academy for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Pain Medicine
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 Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Clinical Pharmacology
American College of Neuropsychopharmacology
American College of Physicians
American Dental Education Association
American Federation for Medical Research
American Gastroenterological Association
American Geriatrics Society
American Headache Society
American Heart Association
American Hospital Association
American Lung Association
American Optometric Association
American Osteopathic Association
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 of Hematology
American Society of Nephrology
American Thoracic Society
American Tinnitus Association
AMVETS
Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology
Association of Academic Health Centers
Association of Academic Physiatrists
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Professors of Medicine
Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine
Association of Specialty Professors
Catholic War Veterans of the U.S.A., Inc.
Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine
Coalition for Health Services Research

FOVA

Council on Social Work Education
Disabled American Veterans
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Medicine-Pediatrics Program Directors Association
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 Veterans' Research and Education Foundations
Pain Care Coalition
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Society for Investigative Dermatology
Society for Neuroscience
Society for Women's Health Research
Society of General Internal Medicine
The American Pain Foundation
The Endocrine Society
The FAIR Foundation
The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
United Spinal Association
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the US
Veterans of the Vietnam War and the Veterans Coalition
VetsFirst