



Discovery and Collaboration for Exceptional Health Care

1946 Public Law 293 is passed—by the 79th Congress and signed into law by President Harry S. Truman, establishing the Department of Medicine and Surgery within the Veterans Administration (later to become the Department of Veterans Affairs). The law allows VA to greatly expand and enhance its physician workforce, enabling it to care more effectively for millions of returning World War II Veterans. Within six months, some 4,000 physicians are recruited into the VA system.

In follow-up to Public Law 293, VA issues Policy Memorandum No. 2, providing the legal basis for affiliations between VA and the nation's medical schools and embarking upon “a program that is without precedent in the history of Federal hospitalization.” The move not only improves VA care and bolsters U.S. physicians' training, but sets the stage for significant growth in VA's medical research program. Northwestern University Medical School and the University of Illinois College of Medicine become the first medical schools to enter into partnerships with VA hospitals, followed soon after by the University of Minnesota Medical School.

1947 By early 1947, VA medical centers—which had no resident physicians in training before 1946—now had some 1,000 residents. The influx of physicians comes to play an important role in VA's ability to conduct groundbreaking studies, including large multisite clinical trials—an effort that would later evolve into VA's Cooperative Studies Program. According to one journalist at the time, “VA medicine has undergone a revolution,” and the changes have “infused the whole hospital program with a spirit of modern, scientific medicine.”

1951 By this year, VA researchers—most with dual VA-university appointments—are publishing more than 800 articles per year in medical journals, compared to fewer than 100 per year in the mid-1940s.

1966 Public Law 785 is enacted by the 89th Congress, establishing medical training as a formal component of VA's medical care mission and authorizing VA to enter into agreements with medical schools to share resources such as equipment, personnel and lab space. The measure is referred to by some as the “Magna Carta” of the partnership between VA and the nation's medical schools.

1972 The VA Medical School Assistance and Health Manpower Training Act expands existing medical education programs and facilities and establishes several new medical schools near existing VA hospitals. One example is East Tennessee State University's James H. Quillen College of Medicine, affiliated with the Mountain Home VA Medical Center.

1976 The Veterans Omnibus Health Care Act of 1976 is signed into law by President Gerald Ford. Among other provisions, the bill provides statutory authority for VA's research mission. The goal is to protect the VA research program from potential reductions in funding that could jeopardize VA affiliations with medical schools and adversely affect patient care and physician recruitment.

1988 Public Law 100-322 authorizes VA to establish nonprofit research institutes to facilitate the flow of non-VA funds—for example, from federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, or from private industry sponsors—to support VA research. Today, there are 82 such institutes. The largest is NCIRE-The Veterans Health Research Institute, supporting research at the San Francisco VA Medical Center.

1990 The Friends of VA Medical Research (FOVA) is founded to advocate for appropriate funding for research and other health program serving Veterans. Today, FOVA is a diverse coalition of more than 80 member organizations, including academic, medical and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy associations; and industry partners.

1998 The Association of American Medical Colleges holds the first meeting of what comes to be known as the Group on Research Advancement and Development (GRAND). The mission of GRAND, formalized in 2002, is to “provide a national forum for the promotion, support, development, and conduct of biomedical research in medical schools and teaching hospitals [including VA medical centers] through the exchange of information and the examination of issues critical to the research enterprise.”

2006 The 60th anniversary of VA Policy Memorandum No. 2 is commemorated at the 117th annual meeting of the Association of American Medical Colleges. At the meeting, VA’s Office of Academic Affiliations debuts a video titled “Still Going Strong: The History of Academic Affiliations.”

2009 The Blue Ribbon Panel on VA-Medical School Affiliations, established by VA in 2006 to advise the agency on enhancing partnerships with medical schools, issues a report titled “Transforming an Historical Partnership for the 21st Century.” The report recommends that “VA and its academic partners redouble their efforts to develop new knowledge through collaborative research.”

2010 An Association of American Medical Colleges working group, comprising experts from VA, the National Institutes of Health, and medical schools and teaching hospitals, issues a report on information technology security and privacy in medical research. The report contains a series of recommendations, building on existing federal and VA-specific safeguards and regulations, intended to fulfill the group’s charge to “examine and develop standard practices and processes that assure data security, yet allow appropriate use of data in research.”

2011 The 65th anniversary of VA Policy Memorandum No. 2 is commemorated during National VA Research Week, both at VA headquarters in Washington, DC, and at VA facilities nationwide.