



VA Research Currents

Principi at HSR&D meeting: 'VHA can be model'

Newly appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi, speaking Feb. 15 at the 19th annual meeting of the Health Services Research and Development Service, lauded research as a "force multiplier" in VA's health-care effort. Mr. Principi pledged to provide researchers with the resources and funding they need to do their work.

"We will make that investment in you—and the improvements you provide will be the interest we receive," he said.

Mr. Principi, a decorated Vietnam veteran who served as deputy director of Veterans Affairs and later as acting secretary under former President Bush, expressed strong support for improving

access and outcomes for veterans. "We must do everything we can to provide veterans with the access to care they have earned through their service and their sacrifice," he said. "And we must

More coverage of the HSR&D meeting inside

not rest until there is no disparity between veterans and any other Americans in the outcomes resulting from their care."

Mr. Principi outlined several ways

see **PRINCIPI** on pg. 3

Study: Flu vaccine could save \$1.3 billion

Routine annual influenza vaccination of all working adults could save the nation as much as \$1.3 billion each year, according to a VA study published in the March 12 issue of *The Archives of Internal Medicine*. Current medical guidelines recommend routine flu vaccination only for people age 50 and older, and other high-risk groups.

The study, which plugged health, labor and economic statistics into a sophisticated computer model, took into account rates of illness from influenza, time lost from work, hourly wages, the costs of vaccination, and

see **FLU** on pg. 2

Update from the Medical Research Service...

New program, piloting this month, aims to upgrade research infrastructure

By Paul M. Hoffman, MD, Director, Medical Research Service

The Medical Research Service, on behalf of the Office of Research and Development, is announcing this month a new initiative designed to improve the infrastructure of VA laboratories.

VA research laboratories nationwide must meet standards for physical and operational infrastructure to ensure their efficient operation. Some facilities are unable to provide sufficient or appropriate laboratory space to investigators because of a shortage or deficient space. The research appropriation cannot be used for capital improvement projects. However, through the Infrastructure Program, we can assist VA facilities by partnering to make necessary improvements to the physical infrastructure and provide new and replacement equipment.

The Research Evaluation Project will assess the current status of our research infrastructure. Survey teams will offer advice on establishing partnerships with Veterans Integrated Service Networks, hospitals, non-profit research corporations, or affiliates and may make recommendations to provide funds for equipment and casework. These surveys will help determine the quality of the physical plant, the organizational structure supporting research, and major items of biomedical equipment.

A pilot program to survey six sites will begin this month. The pilot program will be evaluated to determine the usefulness of the information to Headquarters in making funding decisions, and to the medical center and VISN for improving research operations and infrastructure. If successful, the project will be fully implemented in FY 2002. ■

Recent publications

Below is a sampling of recent publications by VA investigators. Due to space constraints, only VA authors and affiliations are noted. Send notification of upcoming publications and presentations to R&D Communications at researchinfo@vard.org or (fax) (410) 962-0084.

“The Design of a Compliant Composite Crutch.” Maurice LeBlanc, MSME. **Palo Alto.** (VA) *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, Jan./Feb. 2001.

“Drug Interactions with the Dopamine Transporter in Cryopreserved Human Caudate.” Amy J. Eshleman, PhD; Katherine Wolfrum; Kevin Christensen, MS; Aaron T. Janowsky, PhD. **Portland.** *Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics*, Feb. 2001.

“Effects of Cytokines and Fluconazole on the Activity of Human Monocytes Against *Candida Albicans*.” Aldona L. Baltch, MD; Raymond P. Smith, MD. **Albany.** *Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy*, Jan. 2001.

“Hemostatic Effects of Tamoxifen in Hereditary Hemorrhagic Telangiectasia” (letter to editor). Leo R. Zacharski, MD; Scott D. Dunbar, MD. **White River Junction.** *Thrombosis and Haemostasis*, Feb. 2001.

“Inpatient Rehabilitation after Stroke: A Comparison of Lengths of Stay and Outcomes in the Veterans Affairs and Non-Veterans Affairs Health Care System.” Margaret G. Stineman, MD; Byron B. Hamilton, MD, PhD; Barbara Bates, MD; David A. Asch, MD, MBA. **Philadelphia** (MGS, DAA); **Durham** (BBH); **Albany** (BB). *Medical Care*, Feb. 2001.

“Molecular Comparison of Extraintestinal *Escherichia Coli* Isolates of the Same Electrophoretic Lineages from Humans and Domestic Animals.” James R. Johnson, MD; Adam L. Stell, MD; Ulrike Carlino; Thomas A. Russo, MD. **Minneapolis** (JRJ, ALS); **Buffalo** (UC, TAR). *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Jan. 2001.

“Phenotypic Characterization of Mice Bred for High and Low Peak Bone Mass.” Robert F. Klein, MD; Michele E. Guinness, PhD; John K. Belknap, PhD; Eric S. Orwoll, MD. **Portland.** *Journal of Bone and Mineral Research*, Jan. 2001.

“Predictors and Outcomes of Outpatient Mental Health Care: A Four-Year Prospective Study of Elderly Medicare Patients with Substance-Abuse Disorders.” Penny L. Brennan, PhD; Rudolf H. Moos, PhD. **Palo Alto.** *Medical Care*, Jan. 2001.

“Transurethral Incision Compared with Transurethral Resection of the Prostate for Bladder Outlet Obstruction (TUIP vs. TURP): A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials.” Tim Wilt, MD. **Minneapolis.** *Urology*, Feb. 2001.

“Urea Signaling to ERK Phosphorylation in Renal Medullary Cells Requires Extracellular Calcium But Not Calcium Entry.” Xiao-Yan Yang, MS; Hongyu Zhao, MS; Zheng Zhang, MS; David M. Cohen, MD. **Portland.** *American Journal of Physiology: Renal Physiology*, Jan. 2001.

Has your site made plans for Research Week?

As of March 1, the following centers had announced plans to hold special events for National VA Research Week, April 15 – 21: Bay Pines, Bedford, Buffalo, Dallas, Denver, Fresno, Hines, Iowa City, Kansas City, Loma Linda, Minneapolis, Nashville, New York, Portland, Richmond, San Antonio and Shreveport. Planned events include conferences, poster presentations, exhibits, award ceremonies and receptions. Among the invitees are representatives of veterans service organizations, affiliate-university officials, members of Congress, and local media.

If your center has not yet made plans to mark Research Week, contact Christine Amereihn, R&D Communications, at (410) 962-1800, ext. 273, or chris@vard.org for a packet of materials including posters, fact sheets about VA research and suggestions for special events.

Flu (cont. from pg. 1)

other direct and indirect costs. On average, society would save \$13.66 per person vaccinated. If all of the nation's 94 million full-time workers, ages 18 to 64, received the vaccination, these savings would total nearly \$1.3 billion annually.

Lead author Kristin L. Nichol, MD, MPH, MBA, of the Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota Medical School, said the study shows that “substantial health and economic benefits could be realized from vaccinating all working adults against influenza, especially when immunization takes place at the work site or another site that would be efficient and low-cost.” ■

VA Research Currents
is published monthly for the
Office of Research and Development
of the Dept. of Veterans Affairs
by VAR&D Communications
103 S. Gay St., Rm. 517
Baltimore, MD 21202
(410) 962-1800, ext. 223
researchinfo@vard.org

19th annual meeting of HSR&D focuses on improving access and outcomes

About 500 researchers, clinicians and policymakers attended the 19th annual meeting of the Health Services Research and Development Service, held Feb. 14 – 16 in Washington, D.C. Attendees participated in paper sessions, exhibits, workshops and a poster session, all focused on improving access to care and outcomes for VA patients.

Highlights of the meeting included remarks by newly appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi (see page 1); chief R&D Officer John R. Feussner, MD; Under Secretary for Health Thomas Garthwaite, MD; and HSR&D Director John Demakis, MD.

The event also featured keynote speaker Harold Luft, PhD, Caldwell B. Esselstyn Professor of Economics and Director of the Institute for Health Policy Studies at the University of California, San Francisco. Dr. Luft's presentation, "Patient Organization and System Effects on Outcomes," discussed the contextual factors that affect patient care and research. According to Dr. Luft, "Science doesn't exist until it is accessed, used, or at least understood by its target audience."

Current health services research showcased at the meeting included 75 studies chosen for oral presentations, 14 offered through workshops, and 70 poster presentations. Concurrent paper sessions, workshops and poster/exhibits presented during the annual meeting covered a broad spectrum of health care issues including the health consequences of access problems, care and patient satisfaction among women veterans, behavioral risk factors for patients with tobacco and alcohol abuse problems, end of life issues, and the cost of inpatient and outpatient utilization in the VA. ■

Rehabilitation R&D featured in Japanese documentary

Mindy Aisen, MD, director of Rehabilitation R&D, was interviewed for a recent Japanese documentary about assistive technology for people with disabilities. The show, which aired Dec. 10, 2000, on Japanese public television, also featured a segment on rehabilitation research at the Palo Alto VA Medical Center.

Dr. Aisen talked about how VA's commitment to help veterans with disabilities has benefited disabled Americans in general.

The Palo Alto segment showed a patient walking on a treadmill wearing an "anti-gravity" skirt, and featured

comments from Charles G. Bugar, MD, and H.F. Machiel Van der Loos, PhD, of Rehab's Center of Excellence on Mobility.

The program aired on Japanese TV during prime time—unusual for a documentary of this type, according to reporter Midori Yanagihara. She said the show was part of Japan's commemoration of its National Day for the Disabled.

Send notice of publications to (410) 962-0084 (fax) or researchinfo@vard.org

Principi (cont. from pg. 1)

in which research benefits the VA health-care system:

- Research on patient safety and the prevention of adverse outcomes helps make VA a leader in the quality of patient care.
- Research aimed at improving end-of-life care and reducing homelessness among veterans benefits some of the most vulnerable men and women served by VA.
- The HSR&D Quality Enhancement Research Initiative plays a critical role in integrating research and practice throughout the VA health care system.

"The Health Services Research and Development Service plays a vital role for veterans and for our department," Mr. Principi said. "And what you do will become even more important in the future."

The Secretary added that the theme of the annual meeting, improving access to care and outcomes for veterans, has his wholehearted support. He said VA must do everything it can to provide veterans with the access to care they have earned through their sacrifice and service.

"We have a unique opportunity in VA," he said. "If we use our resources efficiently, we can be what we must be—a model for the world in providing high-quality health care at the lowest possible cost. ■"

Hotline Call schedule

R&D Hotline Conference Calls will be held May 14, July 9, Sept. 10, and Nov. 19, noon to 12:50 p.m. (EST). The telephone number to call is (877) 230-4050.

Newsmakers

James. D. Finkelstein, MD, longtime VA investigator and former chief of medicine at the Washington VAMC, received the 2001 Robert H. Herman Memorial Award from the American Society for Clinical Nutrition. Dr. Finkelstein's work on methionine metabolism is important to current understanding of homocysteine, which may be an additional risk factor for heart disease...

Three Clinical Research Career Development awardees have been named by the Cooperative Studies Program: **Anita Deswal, MD**, Houston, will conduct research on racial variations in heart-failure therapy and outcomes. **Elaine Tsai, MD, MPH**, Seattle, will focus on diabetes-related issues including diabetic foot ulcer, neuropathy, lower extremity amputation, type 2 diabetes epidemiology and insulin resistance. **Erin Warshaw, MD**, Minneapolis, will study the effectiveness of new therapies for chronic skin diseases.

Funding opportunities

Details on the following opportunities are available from Dot Brady at dot.brady@hq.med.va.gov or (202) 273-8873.

Bristol-Myers Squibb is accepting applications through May 4 for its Distinguished Achievement Award in Infectious Disease Research. The award consists of \$50,000 and a silver medallion.

U.S. Medicine is accepting nominations through May 1 for its \$10,000 Frank Brown Berry Prize in Federal Medicine, recognizing a federal health professional for outstanding contributions to medicine. Details are available at www.usmedicine.com or from Dot Brady.

The Institute of Medicine is accepting nominations through May 18 for its Lienhard Award, recognizing individuals for outstanding achievements in improving health-care services in the United States. The award comes with \$25,000 and a medal.

Upcoming events

April 2 – 6: Cooperative Studies Program (CSP) Clinical Research Methods Course, Oakbrook III. This five-day course, taught by senior VA biostatisticians, epidemiologists, health-services researchers, health economists and computer scientists, covers current research methodology and teaches participants how to design a scientifically valid study. The 2001 course is full. Registration for the 2002 course, to be given next spring, will open in September 2001. More details will follow in future issues of *Research Currents*.

April 12 – 13: Rehabilitation R&D National Meeting, Crystal City, Va. Theme: "Intellectual Property in VA: Changes, Challenges and Collaboration." Info: Bob Potts, (202) 408-3681.

June 4 – 8: Third Annual Epidemiology Summer Session, hosted by the Durham Epidemiologic Research and Information Center in Durham, N.C. For more information visit <http://hsrd.durham.med.va.gov/eric>.