

Anticipating OUR FUTURE

As we confidently move forward, we must always be aware that we conduct our work in a dynamic environment. We take great pride in our achievements, but we know that the greatest assurance we have of a successful tomorrow is embracing the challenges we face today. The Office of Research and Development will work tirelessly to translate its knowledge into practice; to safeguard our nation, our veterans, and our laboratories; to develop new ways to address the health concerns facing our veterans; and to train a new generation of scientists to carry our mantle into the future.

In an effort to realize our bold vision of Today's VA Research Leading Tomorrow's Health Care, we are building on our progress and striving to rapidly apply our research findings in clinical settings. For example, since a VA cardiologist led a study that showed a simple 15-minute blood test correctly diagnosed 90 percent of congestive heart failure (CHF) cases, more than 1,200 hospitals in the U.S. have begun using the test. Previously, doctors relied on costly, time-consuming tests such as echocardiograms and chest X-rays to diagnose CHF. The new test may someday allow veterans and other patients to perform home testing for CHF.

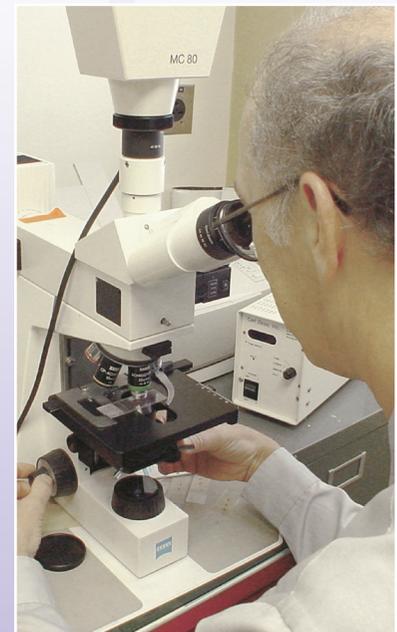
ORD also is working to effect change quickly and directly in many other areas of health care. For instance, VA hospitals are using subcutaneous injections to administer epoetin to patients with end-stage kidney disease since a VA study showed the method was safe and required lower doses than traditional intravenous administration. However, most patients treated outside VA still receive epoetin intravenously, even though the lower doses needed for subcutaneous administration could save the Medicare system up to \$142 million annually. VA is now working with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to evaluate organizational barriers preventing the rapid translation of the finding into clinical use.

And now that a VA trial found arthroscopic surgery for osteoarthritis of the knee produced outcomes no better than placebo, VA is establishing an expert panel to evaluate how much some other surgeries improve quality of life and symptoms. The panel will make recommendations on use of surgical procedures after weighing its findings against surgery costs and risks to patients. Additionally, VA will continue to seek effective solutions for patients suffering with osteoarthritis.

In another translation effort, VA researchers are further analyzing their finding that Geriatric Evaluation Management (GEM), in which multi-disciplinary teams of health professionals manage elderly patients care, significantly improves quality of life. Researchers are now examining the effects of GEM in subgroups of patients, such as those with cancer. Additionally, they will examine drug-related outcomes through an add-on study funded by the National Institute on Aging.

Finally, VA researchers and collaborators who co-developed an oral drug that halts the action of smallpox are now evaluating its use in humans. Until now, public health officials had considered vaccination to be the best defense against smallpox. Routine vaccination against small-

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pox ended in 1972, however, and vaccination is not currently recommended until after a smallpox outbreak has been identified. If additional studies further support the oral drug's effectiveness and safety, it could be delivered in pill or capsule form to prevent and treat smallpox in persons already exposed to the disease. The drug also may be effective against more common viral infections.

In addition to discovering new ways of clinically applying our research results, we are doing our part to ensure our nation's safety. The Office of Research and Development has issued a solicitation to fund new research on Gulf War veterans' illnesses and a range of other health effects of military deployment. Two new Research Enhancement Award Programs, to be funded by our Medical Research Service in 2003, will focus on deployment health and bioterrorism issues. Those efforts will add to VA's substantial existing portfolio of research in that area.

On a related note, VA research has intensified its efforts to ensure that its biomedical laboratories are secure. Last year, we conducted a nationwide survey to assess laboratory security needs, provided funding for physical improvements at more than 30 sites, and issued a new policy directive with guidelines on controlling and monitoring access to research laboratories.

As always, one of our highest priorities will be to protect those veterans who participate in our research studies. Our efforts to ensure that participants joining our studies understand the scope of the research project and their role in it are described in a special supplement to the journal *Medical Care*. We will continue to examine our policies and regulations to make sure that veterans who volunteer in our investigations do so with truly meaningful informed consent.

We will also continue to seek new and better ways to address the health concerns of veterans and the rest of the nation. For example, our Cooperative Studies Program is coordinating a clinical trial of deep-brain stimulation, in which surgically implanted electrodes allow patients to control activity in the area of the brain involved in Parkinson's disease. Our Medical Research Service is working to establish a review system for single-site clinical research studies that are likely to lead to larger clinical trials. Our Rehabilitation Research and Development Service and Health Services Research and Development Service are partners in a new center that will produce statistically significant outcomes data for rehabilitation therapies.

Of course, we recognize that the foundation of our program always will be the dedicated, creative individuals who conduct our research. That is why we will maintain our commitment to recruiting promising young scientists into our research programs across the country. Through our Career Development awards and other training opportunities, we will ensure that VA research sustains the drive and the innovation that will help us make certain our veterans of today and the future receive the best health care possible.

THE FOUNDATION OF VA RESEARCH IS DEDICATED AND CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS