The American Physiological Society
9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Maryland 20814-3991 (USA)

June 9, 2009

The Honorable Tim Johnson
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Johnson,

The American Physiological Society (APS) thanks you for your ongoing support of Medical and Prosthetic Research at the department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA medical research facilities across the country provide veterans access to state-of-the-art health care and conduct research that specifically addresses the medical needs of veterans. The VA health care system currently faces many growing challenges, including both an aging veteran population and the needs of veterans who are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. The medical problems facing many new veterans simply cannot be adequately treated with current medical and psychological understanding and technology. The APS urges you to make every effort to fully fund the Administration’s $580 million FY 2010 budget request for Medical and Prosthetic Research at the VA.

The APS is a professional society dedicated to fostering research and education as well as the dissemination of scientific knowledge concerning how the organs and systems of the body work. The Society was founded in 1887 and now has nearly 10,000 member physiologists. Our members conduct research at colleges, universities, medical schools, and other public and private research institutions across the U.S., including VA facilities.

The VA conducts research to address the medical needs of veterans, including rehabilitation following traumatic injury, development of state of the art prosthetic devices to recover functionality, and treatment for post traumatic stress disorder. These medical problems are more prevalent among veterans than the general population, but VA research also explores other conditions such as stroke, diabetes, pain and osteoporosis that are typical of any population. New technologies and treatments developed at VA medical centers lead to healthcare improvements for all Americans.

Because most VA researchers are also clinicians caring for patients, the VA research system is ideally situated to foster the translation of basic biomedical research findings into clinical useful diagnostics and treatment modalities. The use of electronic health records also allows VA researchers to maximize the information learned from treating patients in the clinic and in research studies.

Finally, in addition to focusing on research and patient care, VA medical researchers also educate the next generation of physician-scientists. Currently, more than half of all practicing physicians in the US receive some of their training at a VA facility.
In FY 2008 and 2009, Congress increased funding for VA research. This has allowed VA researchers to pursue new ideas that would otherwise go unexplored, and expand the research of ongoing promising areas of science. In order to build on this investment in the VA research enterprise, the APS urges you to make every effort to provide the VA with their full research budget request in FY 2010, with an additional $142 million for building and infrastructure development. Many VA research facilities are in need of repair, maintenance and upgrade of both buildings and equipment. The APS joins our colleagues at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and the Friends of VA in recommending that $142 million for facility upgrades be provided to the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program in addition to the urgently needed funding for research.

Sincerely,

Gary Sieck, Ph.D.
President
The American Physiological Society