March 30, 2010

Dear Senator/Representative,

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 APS urges you to make every effort to fund the VA Medical and Prosthetic research program at a level of $1 billion in FY 2011, including $700 million for research and $300 million for infrastructure.

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.

Challenges for VA research and medical care

The VA health care system currently faces many challenges, including meeting the needs of veterans who are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Many returning veterans suffer from traumatic brain injuries, amputation, spinal cord injury, burns, mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, and polytrauma. The VA offers coordinated, state-of-the-art care supported by cutting edge research into the underlying pathophysiology and treatment of the conditions facing new veterans.

The VA research program specifically addresses 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 cancer that are typical of any population. New technologies and treatments developed at VA medical centers lead to healthcare improvements for all Americans.

Bringing innovation to health care

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 clinically relevant diagnostics and treatment modalities. The VA has developed a number of programs that facilitate the translation of knowledge gained in the lab to use in a clinical setting.
The VA Technology Transfer Program works with researchers to bring their inventions to market so that new technologies can benefit both veterans and the general public.

The use of electronic health records allows VA researchers to maximize the information gained from treating patients in the clinic and in research studies.

The VA created a central Institutional Review Board (the institutional group that reviews, approves and oversees human research studies) in order to facilitate large, multi-center clinical trials and ensure consistent and appropriate ethical and scientific review.

Finally, in addition to focusing on research and patient care, VA medical researchers also play a critical role in educating 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.

**Investing in the future**

Over the last three years, Congress has increased funding for VA Medical and Prosthetic research, allowing clinicians and researchers to pursue new ideas that would otherwise go unexplored and expand research in promising areas of science. In order to build on this investment in the VA research enterprise, the APS joins our colleagues at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and the Friends of VA in urging you to provide the VA with $1 billion in FY 2011, including $700 million for research and $300 million for infrastructure improvement.

Funding VA research at $700 million would provide an inflationary increase over the FY 2010 allocation, plus an additional $100 million to allow VA researchers to perform critical research addressing the health care needs of increasing numbers of veterans returning home from service in Iraq and Afghanistan and to take advantage of new and expanding scientific opportunities. In addition, to address the fact that many VA research facilities are in need of repair, we recommend that an additional $300 million go to the maintenance and upgrade of both buildings and equipment. While the needs at VA research facilities far exceed this level of funding, $300 million would allow the VA to get started on long overdue infrastructure improvement.

Sincerely,

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