

Report to Congress on the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program Fund Allocation Plan

OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT OF THE SPINAL CORD INJURY RESEARCH PROGRAM

At the direction of the United States Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD) manages targeted biomedical research. The U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (USAMRMC) is responsible for administering many of these appropriations. The USAMRMC is a major subordinate Command of the United States Army Medical Command. The Commanding General (CG), USAMRMC is assigned authority as the Executive Agent for a number of medical research, development, and acquisition programs. Additionally, as directed by Congress, the USAMRMC manages Congressional Special Interest (CSI) Medical Research Programs. CSI funds are not in the President's Budget; Congress adds them annually to the DoD appropriation to fund new programs or to augment DoD or Army programs. The Command's CSI vision is to ensure the sponsorship of good science that fulfills the intent of Congress. When appropriate, the research results have been applied within the DoD as well as the civilian sector.

The USAMRMC is responsible for planning, coordinating, integrating, programming, budgeting, and executing CSI programs using a two-tier review process. The USAMRMC's flexible 7-year execution and management cycle includes the receipt of annual congressional appropriations, stakeholders meeting, vision setting, proposal review, and oversight of research grants. Briefly, following receipt of appropriations, each program's external advisory board of leading scientists, clinicians, and disease survivors (integrated Joint Programmatic Committee) develops an investment strategy for the upcoming year that meets the unique needs of the research field and encourages exploration of innovative, novel, and underinvestigated areas spanning from basic laboratory science to clinical trials. Program announcements requesting research proposals through specific award mechanisms are subsequently prepared and released. To ensure that each program's research portfolio reflects not only the most meritorious science, but also the most programmatically relevant, the USAMRMC developed a unique two-tier review procedure for research proposals, composed of scientific (peer) review and a separate programmatic review. Scientifically sound proposals that best meet the program's interests and goals are recommended to the CG, USAMRMC, for funding. Once the CG approves the funding recommendations, awards are made in the form of 1- to 5-year grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements and assigned to Grants Managers for providing full cycle support of research grants and outcomes. These well-established processes are scientifically sound, innovative, and responsive to congressional intent and the needs of the public.

FISCAL YEAR 2009 SPINAL CORD INJURY RESEARCH PROGRAM

The *Committee Print of the House Committee on Appropriations on H.R. 2638 / Public Law 110-329*, the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009 (September 30, 2008), directed \$35 million to establish a competitive, peer-reviewed spinal cord injury research and treatment program.

The first major milestone in the execution and management cycle of the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program is the stakeholders meeting, currently scheduled for March 2009. Renowned scientists, clinicians, and disease survivors from academia as well as from other funding agencies and spinal cord advocacies such as the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation and National Spinal Cord Injury Association will be invited to the stakeholders meeting to discuss issues and gaps critical to spinal cord injuries as well as potential means to address them. Utilizing the recommendations from the stakeholders, the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program integrated Joint Programmatic Committee, to be composed of experts and survivors in the spinal cord injury field, will assemble in March 2009 to determine the vision and investment strategy for the FY 09 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program. These program priorities shall focus on areas that will move the field forward and may include gaps in knowledge of spinal cord injuries or resources needed to conduct research. USAMRMC staff will then prepare and release Program Announcements in May 2009 to request proposals from investigators interested in competing for funds to conduct research on the FY 09 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program priorities.

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In keeping with USAMRMC's two-tier proposal review process, scientific (peer) review, the first level of review for the FY 09 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program, will be conducted in October 2009, by an external panel that includes scientific experts and spinal cord injury survivors. Peer review is a criterion-based process whereby proposals are judged on their own scientific and technical merit based on established evaluation criteria. The second tier of review, programmatic review, will be conducted in December 2009 by the same integrated Joint Programmatic Committee that previously established the program priorities and investment strategy. In contrast to the scientific peer review, the goal of programmatic review will be to develop funding recommendations based on the ratings and recommendations of scientific peer review that balance the most meritorious and innovative science across many disciplines and offer the highest promise for fulfilling the programmatic goals of the FY 09 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program.

SUMMARY

In summary, USAMRMC will manage the \$35 million appropriation for the FY 09 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program using its established execution and management cycle. The following time line is anticipated. A stakeholders meeting will take place in March 2009 with the vision setting and investment strategy tentatively scheduled for March 2009. Program Announcements requesting research proposals will be released in May 2009. An external scientific peer review will evaluate proposals for scientific merit in October 2009, and the integrated Joint Programmatic Committee will programatically review proposals in December 2009. Approval of award recommendations by the CG, USAMRMC, will follow programmatic review. Award negotiations will commence following the CG's approval and will be completed by September 2010. The USAMRMC will plan, execute, and manage the FY 09 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program with the same rigor and integrity as it has done in the past.



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

MAR 13 2009

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed report is submitted in response to the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2009, requesting that the Secretary of Defense report to the Congressional defense committees no later than 120 days after enactment of the Act, describing the criteria to be used in determining how the funds provided for the establishment of the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program will be allocated.

We are pleased to provide the final report with a plan for the execution and management of the Spinal Cord Research Program. The U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command will manage the \$35 million appropriation for the Fiscal Year 2009 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program, using its established execution and management cycle. The following time line is anticipated: A stakeholder's meeting will take place in March 2009; program announcements requesting research proposals will be released in May 2009; an external scientific peer review to evaluate proposals for scientific merit is scheduled to occur in October 2009; and the integrated Joint Programmatic Committee will programmatically review proposals in December 2009.

Approval of award recommendations by the Commanding General (CG), U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (USAMRMC), will follow programmatic review. Award negotiations will commence following CG's approval and will be completed by September 2010. USAMRMC will plan, execute and manage the fiscal year 2009 Spinal Cord Injury Research Program with the same rigor and integrity as it has done in the past.

Thank you for your continued support of the Military Health System.

Sincerely,

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S. Ward Casscells, MD



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

MAR 13 2009

The Honorable Ben Nelson
Chairman, Subcommittee on Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed report is submitted in response to the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2009, requesting that the Secretary of Defense report to the Congressional defense committees no later than 120 days after enactment of the Act, describing the criteria to be used in determining how the funds provided for the establishment of the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program will be allocated.

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Thank you for your continued support of the Military Health System.

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S. Ward Casscells, MD



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

MAR 13 2009

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed report is submitted in response to the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2009, requesting that the Secretary of Defense report to the Congressional defense committees no later than 120 days after enactment of the Act, describing the criteria to be used in determining how the funds provided for the establishment of the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program will be allocated.

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S. Ward Casscells, MD



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

MAR 13 2009

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed report is submitted in response to the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2009, requesting that the Secretary of Defense report to the Congressional defense committees no later than 120 days after enactment of the Act, describing the criteria to be used in determining how the funds provided for the establishment of the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program will be allocated.

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S. Ward Casscells, MD



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

MAR 13 2009

The Honorable Susan Davis
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

The enclosed report is submitted in response to the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2009, requesting that the Secretary of Defense report to the Congressional defense committees no later than 120 days after enactment of the Act, describing the criteria to be used in determining how the funds provided for the establishment of the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program will be allocated.

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Thank you for your continued support of the Military Health System.

Sincerely,
*All Best
Ward*

S. Ward Casscells, MD



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

MAR 13 2009

The Honorable John P. Murtha
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed report is submitted in response to the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2009, requesting that the Secretary of Defense report to the Congressional defense committees no later than 120 days after enactment of the Act, describing the criteria to be used in determining how the funds provided for the establishment of the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program will be allocated.

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