

## Editorial

### Special Issue on Research in the Department of Veterans Affairs

**T**his special issue of *JAAA* is dedicated to the audiologic research program developed and supported by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In a special preface, Allen Boysen, who directs the national Audiology and Speech Pathology Service of VA, describes the research program and the scope of research activities across the many VA hospitals and VA investigators participating in the program. The special issue is then introduced by guest co-editors Vern Larson and Lucille Beck. Vern Larson is on the faculty of East Tennessee State



University, Johnson City, TN and serves as Chair and Principal Investigator of the joint National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders/VA Hearing Aid Clinical Trials project. Lucille Beck is Chief, Audiology and Speech Pathology at the Washington, DC VA Medical Center and directs the VA National Hearing Aid Program.

*James Jerger  
Editor-in-Chief*

### National VA Research Program

**T**he Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is pleased to be able to highlight in this special issue some of the research accomplished by VA audiologists. Following the academic medical model, VA audiologists care for patients, teach graduate students and residents, and engage in their own research. This model has



led to a steady source of well-trained clinical audiologists recruited to VA as staff who continue their interest into questions of treatment efficacy.

The VA research program is made up of three administratively distinct research services. Medical Research Service supports basic and clinical studies that advance knowledge leading to

improvements in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases and disabilities. Rehabilitation Research and Development Service develops devices to improve the quality of life of disabled veterans in need of prosthetic devices, sensory aids, and mobility assistance. Health Services Research and Development Service systematically examines the impact of the organization, management, and financing of health care services on the delivery, quality, cost, and outcomes of care.

In fiscal year 1995, total VA research funding was \$252 million, which supported approximately 1800 research projects. Of those projects, approximately 1600 were investigator initiated, a program analogous to the National Institutes of Health's investigator-initiated program. VA also has career development programs to provide a time-limited opportunity for individuals to develop skills to become leaders in VA as clinician-researchers. A program unique to VA, because they are conducted in one of the largest health care systems in the nation, are the cooperative studies: multihospital, randomized clinical trials of new treatment approaches.

VA research in audiology over the past decade has produced new insights into cochlear hair cell regeneration, adaptive digital hearing aid systems, effects of auditory deprivation, needs for binaural hearing aid fitting, detection of hearing loss secondary to ototoxic agents, ear canal acoustics, hearing aid selection and fitting, otoacoustic emissions, speech intelligibility, and numerous other diagnostic and treatment considerations.

These individual investigator-initiated research efforts have been joined by several large cooperative studies during this period of time. One such study involved over 80 cochlear implant recipients and seven VA research sites to compare the benefits of single- and multichannel

cochlear implants. These seven sites now maintain active cochlear implant clinical centers and participate in studies with new device-processing strategies. Another study has involved five VA research sites in refining procedures for detecting early signs of ototoxic effects on hearing.

In 1992, VA and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders signed a collaborative agreement to pursue research interests in hearing aids. Five initiatives were established between the two agencies. They have included development of requests for proposals, applications for new technology, a biennial hearing aid research and development conference, and a hearing aid clinical trial. The clinical trial addresses questions pertaining to linear amplification, compression amplification, and wide dynamic range compression. The study will involve 360 VA and non-VA patients and is being conducted as a multicenter cooperative study at eight VA medical centers. It is expected that this study will be followed by a series of clinical trials over the next decade.

Mindful of the fact that many hearing-impaired veterans sustained hearing loss secondary to disease or noise exposure during service to our country, VA continues to support research into audiologic technique and auditory theory, as shown in the sampling of reports included in this special issue. The articles herein are both theoretically and clinically relevant and range from studies of the vestibular and peripheral and central auditory systems to studies of patient performance using contemporary hearing aid circuitry. I am proud to have the opportunity to introduce these articles to the readers of *JAAA*.

*Allen Boysen*