



A Monthly Newsletter from ADEA Executive Director Richard W. Valachovic, D.M.D., M.P.H.

*Great science  
contributes to  
improvements  
in health.*

*In this month's letter, Dr. Rick Valachovic, Executive Director of the American Dental Education Association, describes the dental research community's response to funding made available through the federal stimulus package.*



### **When Opportunity Knocks, An Energized Dental Research Community Answers**

If there was ever any doubt that research was alive and well on the campuses of North American dental schools, it most definitely was put to rest this past spring by the outpouring of applications for research grants to the [National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research](#) (NIDCR). The specific number of applications is not yet available, but NIDCR's parent agency, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), also reports a bumper crop of applications in response to the announcement of new funding through the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#) (ARRA). According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, NIH expects to review 115,000 grant applications in 2009, a dramatic increase over the 77,000 applications reviewed last year.

Researchers at the [University of Florida College of Dentistry](#) (UFCD), which currently ranks fourth among all dental schools in the United States in NIH/NIDCR funding for research, contributed their share of applications to the large tally. In April, when the first ARRA-related application deadline loomed, the university's Office of Research took in 42 proposals—the same number it received in January through March combined.

"Our faculty was energized by this opportunity," says UFCD Dean Dr. Terri Dolan of the period following the announcement that ARRA had allocated an additional \$102 million in funding for NIDCR. "You could feel it in the air, the enthusiasm and excitement."

The ARRA funding, which will be distributed over two fiscal years, represents a 25% increase over NIDCR's FY 2009 appropriation of \$403 million. That's great news, because every year proposals deemed meritorious do not receive grants because of insufficient funds.

"Consistent with the intent of the ARRA stimulus, we plan to reach applications that are scientifically meritorious but that were previously beyond our pay line," says Dr. Isabel Garcia, Deputy Director of NIDCR. In 2008, 19.8% of research project applications reviewed by NIDCR in 2008 received awards.

Boston's [Forsyth Institute](#) has already benefited from the increased availability of NIDCR funds. As the nation's leading center for oral health research, Forsyth had a number of worthy projects ready to go when the ARRA funding was announced earlier this year. "We are pleased that research is part of the equation for economic stimulus," says Forsyth President and CEO Dr. Phil Stashenko, "and we are thrilled that three of our scientists received funding in the first round."

Dr. Chris Fox, Executive Director for the International Association for Dental Research (IADR) and the [American Association for Dental Research](#) (AADR), reports an equal level of enthusiasm from the dental research community at large. "This has been a tremendous boon to our community," he tells me. "Most of our AADR members were busy writing grants in March and April. Even if many of these are not funded, the work that's been done can be applied to future R01 and other grant applications. This is a tremendous opportunity that will pay dividends for years to come."

Everyone I have spoken with agrees that the availability of ARRA funding has stimulated the development of innovative project ideas and new collaborations. At the same time, the unprecedented outpouring of proposals unleashed by ARRA funds could only spring from a well-established research network. The magnitude of the

response demonstrates the underutilized potential that exists in the realm of biomedical research and raises urgent questions. Will society take advantage of this capacity? Will government make the kind of sustained commitment to research that can ultimately produce enduring results?

"I hope the Obama administration will see how great science contributes to improvements in health and resume more reasonable funding of NIH." That's Phil Stashenko's take on these matters. "There's a tremendous need to repopulate and rebuild the oral health research community. It's been a challenge to attract and retain people in research careers, but NIDCR has been at the forefront of this effort."

President Obama's budget proposal for 2010 requests \$408 million for NIDCR, a mere \$5 million above the current budget level, excluding ARRA funding. Nevertheless, there is optimism that acknowledgement of the value of research embodied in the stimulus package may translate into longer term support.

As Terri Dolan points out, "Recognizing that the research mission of higher education has value as an important part of stimulating the economy is very positive, particularly when public institutions are stressed and undergoing cuts from their states."

Indeed, the first ARRA grants do seem to be achieving their goal of stimulating the economy. One ARRA program has funded summer jobs in research labs for students and science educators in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and all 50 states. Of these positions, 95 are in dental, craniofacial, and oral health research. At Forsyth, the three ARRA grants have allowed the Institute to hire four technicians and postdoctoral researchers for well-compensated positions.

You can track the awards with a new tool, [RePORT](#) (Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tool), that provides information about ARRA funding through both NIH and NIDCR. Meanwhile, the folks at these agencies have their work cut out for them. Dealing with the volume of ARRA-related grant applications in the short time that remains in FY 2009 presents many challenges. Nevertheless, applicants tell me NIDCR staff members have demonstrated their ability to work smoothly under pressure. "They've been unfailingly helpful," Phil told me. "They do a phenomenal job of promoting and encouraging applications and assisting applicants."

Chris Fox concurs. "We owe the folks at NIH and NIDCR and all the reviewers a debt of gratitude."

As I am finalizing this letter, we have just learned that [Dr. Francis Collins](#) has been nominated by President Obama to succeed Dr. Elias Zerhouni as NIH Director. Most of us know Dr. Collins from his time at NIH leading the Human Genome Project, but he has a remarkable connection to our community as well. Dr. Collins co-authored a paper with NIDCR Director Dr. Larry Tabak in the *Journal of Dental Education*, "[A Call for Increased Education in Genetics for Dental Health Professionals.](#)"

This link to our corner of the world represents a much broader acknowledgement of the ways in which fundamental scientific research underlies and enriches each of the practices that make up the health professions. I suspect these developments will continue to energize our colleagues, and I join them in hoping this temporary stimulus represents the start of an enduring awareness of the value of research for the economy, our institutions, and ultimately our health.



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