



February 21, 2011

Mr. Norman Augustine  
Chair, Scientific Management Review Board  
Office of the Director  
National Institutes of Health  
6705 Rockledge Drive, Suite 750  
Bethesda, MD 20892  
[smrb@mail.nih.gov](mailto:smrb@mail.nih.gov)

Dear Chairman Augustine and Members of the NIH Scientific Management Review Board:

The Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine sends this letter to provide comments on the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) Task Force Straw Model showing the proposed new National Institutes of Health (NIH) home for current NCRR programs.

Our college recognizes the importance of the NIH's initiative to create the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), and we welcome the potential benefits of an invigorated focus on translational medicine and therapeutics. Our faculty members are proud of their contributions to improving human health through transdisciplinary involvement and collaboration in translational research and comparative medicine. The support offered by NCRR programs to our institution and faculty have made possible their contributions to our nation's health, and we greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to further advance the successes of critical NCRR programs.

In review of the Straw Model, we have the following comments:

1. To successfully fulfill its mission of accelerating the development and delivery of new, more effective therapeutics, the NCATS will rely on a diversity of appropriately trained laboratory scientists and clinical researchers capitalizing on the development of tools and technologies and making discoveries at molecular and cellular levels that can be tested and proven in animal based studies.
2. Although a rational argument can be made for including NCRR's Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) program, which is designed to develop teams of investigators from various fields of research who can transform scientific discoveries made in the laboratory into treatments and strategies for patients in the clinic into the new NCATS, the same cannot be said for excluding and dismembering other components of



NCCR, such as animal resources, training programs, and high-end instrumentation and technologies which are so critical to NCATS mission.

3. Further, as indicated in the NCCR Task Force Straw Model, proposing to subdivide these NCCR components disrupts the extant scientific synergies that have been demonstrated meritorious to date and forfeits the strategic relationships that have been built between programs over the last 20 years. For example, splitting the animal resources into different administrative structures erects a bureaucratic obstacle that needlessly hinders the flow of basic scientific discoveries made in induced genetic mutations in mice to clinically applicable mechanisms-of-action studied and tested in non-human primates.
4. Although it is expected that, following this restructuring, NCCR will no longer exist as a center, a rational consideration would be to maintain a large component of NCCR programs together after reassignment of the CTSA program within the new NCATS. Those charged with making these decisions should be mindful that NCCR's unique, cross-cutting programs are and have been successful through careful planning, thoughtful leadership, and effective management by its administrative and scientific staff, program officers, and officials who understand these programs and are most qualified to ensure continued success of their respective programs and initiatives.

Our college strongly recommends that the NCCR's Division of Comparative Medicine be retained as a functional entity after reassignment of the CTSA program. The optimal location of the unit within the NIH (e.g., NCATS, National Institute of General Medical Sciences, or Office of the Director) should be carefully deliberated with input from NCCR staff and stakeholders.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at (540) 231-7910 or [cvmdean@vt.edu](mailto:cvmdean@vt.edu) if we may provide additional information regarding our recommendations on the Straw Model.

Sincerely,



Gerhardt G. Schurig, DVM, Ph.D.  
Dean