

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

Address:

Office of Research on
Women's Health
National Institutes of Health
Building 1, Room 201
1 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20892
Web site: www4.od.nih.gov/orwh

Director:

Vivian W. Pinn, M.D.
(301) 402-1770 (phone)
(301) 402-1798 (fax)
Email: vp3w@nih.gov

Legislative Contact:

Mary G. Lawrence
(301) 402-1770 (phone)
(301) 402-1798 (fax)
Email: lawrencm@od.nih.gov

Mission:

The Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) serves as the focal point for women's health research at the NIH, including setting and monitoring policy; promoting, stimulating, and supporting research; and enhancing the recruitment and advancement of women in biomedical careers. The ORWH works in partnership with the NIH institutes and centers (ICs), as well as other governmental and non-governmental organizations, to address its mandate to:

- Advise the NIH Director and staff on matters relating to research on women's health;
- Strengthen and enhance research related to diseases, disorders, and conditions that affect women;
- Ensure that research conducted and supported by NIH adequately addresses issues regarding women's health;
- Ensure that women are appropriately represented in biomedical and biobehavioral research studies supported by NIH;
- Develop opportunities for and support recruitment, retention, re-entry, and advancement of women in biomedical careers; and
- Support research on women's health issues.

ORWH works in partnership with the NIH ICs to ensure that women's health research is part of the scientific framework at NIH and throughout the scientific community.

Selected Achievements and Initiatives:

Four overarching themes for research on women's health are emphasized by the ORWH in collaboration with the NIH ICs. These include:

- *Lifespan Issues* and the continuum from intrauterine life and infancy, through menopausal transition into elderly years.
- *Sex/Gender Differences* in health and disease and therapeutic interventions at genetic, molecular, cellular and functional levels.
- *Health Disparities/Differences and Diversity* among different populations or subpopulations of women.
- *Interdisciplinary Research and Career Development* with collaboration and integration of knowledge from disparate disciplines and multiple areas of scientific expertise.

For FY 2005, ORWH is encouraging greater emphasis within the research continuum that addresses important questions concerning sex and gender differences, and includes basic, clinical and translational research. Research is needed to identify the optimal methods to translate knowledge gained from basic science research into clinical research and practice in order to improve clinical outcomes in women. A number of general areas of research have been identified for FY 2005, including studies of the pathogenesis of diseases that differentially affect women, including those affecting behavior and the endocrine, musculoskeletal, autoimmune, urologic, cardiovascular, ophthalmic, and

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neurobiological systems. Two areas of special emphasis include Prevention and Treatment, and Sex Specific Biology and Genetics/Pharmacogenomics.

Interdisciplinary Initiatives:

ORWH developed, implemented and funded new and innovative interdisciplinary research centers and interdisciplinary research training programs. These programs benefit both women's and men's health through sex and gender research, interdisciplinary scientific collaboration, and support for young investigators in a mentored environment to become independent investigators doing research in women's health. ORWH held the first Interdisciplinary Symposium on Women's Health Research which brought together scholars and researchers from both programs to share science.

- *Specialized Centers of Research on Sex and Gender Factors Affecting Women's Health (SCORs)* — Eleven SCORs on Sex and Gender Factors Affecting Women's Health were established by ORWH. ORWH led the development and implementation of this major new research initiative. The multidisciplinary nature of these centers provides innovative approaches to advancing research on the role of sex and gender related health effects. Primary research areas currently under study include pain, pregnancy, substance abuse, and urologic health. The centers are co-funded by six NIH institutes and the Food and Drug Administration.

Career Development:

One of the major mandates of ORWH is to develop and support opportunities for recruitment, retention, re-entry, and advancement of women in biomedical careers. A report, *Women in Biomedical Careers:*

Dynamics of Change; Strategies for the 21st Century, from an ORWH sponsored workshop to identify successful ways to overcome obstacles to research careers, continues to serve as the basis for ORWH activities to increase opportunities for women in biomedical careers.

Inclusion of Women and Minorities in Clinical Research:

The ORWH leads the NIH effort in monitoring adherence to the NIH policy that requires inclusion of women and minorities in clinical research studies. In collaboration with a trans-NIH committee, the ORWH ensures that implementation is uniform across the NIH, and provides aggregate data to document the numbers of women, men, and minorities included in all clinical research studies, as well as those enrolled in Phase III clinical studies, supported by the NIH.