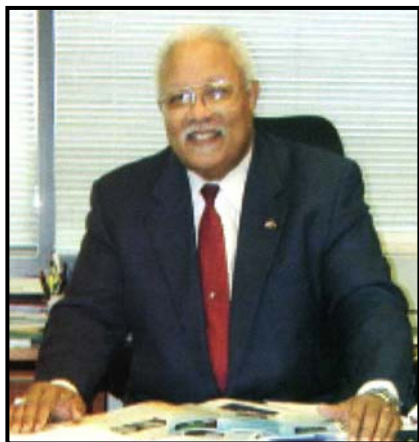


A Message from the NCRR Associate Director

September 14, 2008



It is my pleasure and honor to extend greetings to the participants in the *Fifth International Symposium on Recent Advances in Environmental Health Research*, which is being organized and hosted by Jackson State University.

The Research Centers at Minority Institutions (RCMI) Program in the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda Maryland (USA) has been a proud sponsor of this conference series since its inception in 2004. The mission of the RCMI Program is to expand the nations' capacity for research in the health sciences by assisting, through competitive grant support, predominantly minority institutions that award doctorates in the health sciences or sciences related to health by strengthening their research infrastructure. The primary goal is to enable these institutions to become more competitive in obtaining support to conduct biomedical and/or behavioral research relevant to the mission of the Public Health Service.

Throughout the RCMI Program's illustrious history, I have seen the program grow from the initial seven institutions in four states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to the 18 institutions located in ten states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico that are currently supported via the program. The appropriation for the program has increased from \$4.7 million in fiscal year (FY) 1985 to approximately \$53.0 million in FY 2008. At its inception, I was the Program Director and the principal shepherd of the RCMI Program. In 2004, I entrusted the directorship of the program to Dr. Shelia McClure. Over the course of twenty years, the National Center for Research Resources has funded 21 academic institutions, including 10 graduate schools, 7 medical schools, 3 schools of pharmacy, and 1 school of veterinary medicine via the RCMI Program. In addition, several Institutes and Centers at the NIH have facilitated the growth and success of the RCMI Program through collaborative relationships including the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; National Institute on Aging; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Eye Institute; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Human Genome Research Institute; National Institute of Mental Health; and the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities.

In addition to the 18 centers supported by the RCMI Program, 2007 marked the launching of what I feel will be the most exciting collaboration among centers, the RCMI Translational Research Network (RTRN). The RTRN is increasing the opportunity for multi-site clinical and translational research among RCMI and other collaborating institutions throughout the nation. Research by investigators at these institutions are focused on cancer, diabetes, renal disease, infant mortality, HIV/AIDS,

cardiovascular diseases, and other diseases that disproportionately affect minority populations. The network will allow investigators to pool resources and expertise as they conduct multi-center research that will increase the productivity and impact of each of the individual centers. It is fitting that the Data Technology and Coordinating Center (DTCC) for the network be located at Jackson State University's eCenter. The DTCC for the RTRN provides a secure website, data management and data sharing tools, staff, hardware, and software for collection, analysis, storage, and exchange of clinical data for multi-site studies. The launching of the RTRN marked a high point in the evolution of the RCMI Program.

The research highlighted in this *Fifth International Symposium on Recent Advances in Environmental Health Research* exemplifies the program's continuing commitment to environmental health research and the importance of global collaborations that will expedite the translation of research from the bench, to the bedside, and ultimately to improved health outcomes for every member of our society.

I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank each and every one of you for your efforts in making the RCMI Program and this symposium a success. Special thanks to the leaders of RCMI and RTRN activities at Jackson State University-Dr. Ronald Mason Jr., President and PI of the RCMI Program; Dr. Abdul Mohamed and Dr. Paul Tchounwou, former and current RCMI Program Directors; and Drs. James Perkins and Edwina Barnett, the PI and Program Director for the RTRN-DTCC.



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Director, Division of Research Infrastructure

National Institute of Health

As the steward of medical and behavioral research for the nation, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) mission is *science in pursuit of fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to extend healthy life and reduce the burdens of illness and disability*. The NIH is dedicated to improving the health of Americans through both the conduct and funding of biomedical research, training the scientific workforce, and communicating health information to the nation and indeed to the world.

The National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) is one of the 27 Institutes and Centers at the NIH. NCRR provides the resources and tools that enable biomedical research through its divisions of Clinical Research Resources, Comparative Medicine, Biomedical Technology Research and Resources, and Research Infrastructure. The Division of Research Infrastructure (DRI) provides research support through the following programs: 1. Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) Program; the RCMI Clinical Research Infrastructure Initiative (RCRII); the Institutional Development Award (IDeA) Program; the Animal Facilities Improvement Program (AFIP); and the Research Facilities Improvement Program (RFIP). The philosophy behind these programs, and for all of the NIH, is that the health of the individual is essentially inseparable from the health of the larger community, and that the health of every community collectively determines the overall health status of the nation.