



## Building academic–military research collaborations to improve the health of service members

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 9 September 2016

Revised 4 May 2017

Accepted 8 May 2017

#### Keywords:

Collaboration

Research

Military health

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Academic–military research collaborations are desirable for many reasons; however, little guidance in the literature exists to help researchers understand collaboration requirements.

**Purpose:** To describe the process for establishing academic–military research collaborations.

**Method:** Specific collaboration requirements researchers must be aware of are outlined, two case studies are provided, and opportunities for and challenges with collaborations are discussed.

**Discussion:** Academic–military collaborations made it possible to conduct studies of stigma and barriers with mental health care among military nursing personnel and the utilization of secure messaging for health concerns with service members and healthcare providers. Planning these efforts began in the earliest stages of developing research proposals, and additional time was required to complete regulatory requirements prior to study implementation. Understanding military-specific considerations and establishing clear expectations and responsibilities were essential.

**Conclusions:** Despite the challenges involved, academic–military collaborations improve the quality of the research by enhancing access to funding, expertise, and resources.

**Cite this article:** Hernandez, S. H. A., Morgan, B. J., Hernandez, B. F., & Parshall, M. B. (2017, ■). Building academic–military research collaborations to improve the health of service members. *Nursing Outlook*, ■(■), 1–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2017.05.001>.

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### Introduction

The members of the U.S. military are a unique population. This population comprises more than 1.3 million active and more than 800,000 reserve component

service members who are stationed in a variety of locations throughout the world ([Defense Manpower Data Center, n.d.](#); [Department of Defense, n.d.](#)). Members of the military are demographically diverse, based on gender, race and ethnicity, marital status, and level of education ([Department of Defense, n.d.](#)) and may have

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2017.05.001>

unique health care needs because of their service (Olenick, Flowers, & Diaz, 2015). These unique health care needs often require continued long-term follow-up care after service members separate from military service (Olenick et al., 2015).

Research collaborations between academic institutions and the U.S. military support effective and efficient research activities to meet the needs of service members and their dependents. Collaborative research opportunities and agreements allow academic and military researchers to share unique expertise and optimize the use of limited resources. Through such partnerships, mutually beneficial institutional relationships develop that promote the creation and exchange of knowledge to ensure the availability of a fit and ready military force and accelerate technological innovation (Gupta, Sergi, Tran, Nek, & Howieson, 2014).

Academic–military research collaborations frequently focus on the development of weapons and offensive and defensive capabilities, with technological advances often adapted to commercial and personal use (Gupta et al., 2014; Mowery, 1998). Although less publicized, the Department of Defense also supports research focused on the health and well-being of military service members and their families. Much of this research is conducted within and across military service branches. However, Department of Defense-sponsored research offers many potential opportunities for academic and military researchers, including nurse researchers, to engage in collaborative agreements and research partnerships (Defense Innovation Marketplace, n.d.).

Past academic and military collaborative research has advanced knowledge and patient care for both military and civilian populations. For example, collaboration between civilian, federal, and military consultants resulted in the Traumatic Brain Disorder Common Data Elements outcome battery that has been used to screen for post-traumatic stress disorder in service members and civilians who experience a traumatic brain injury (Haarbauer-Krupa et al., 2017; National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2017). Another research collaboration among the Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Army, and University of Washington provided preliminary evidence that participants who were treated with prazosin had significant reductions in their Clinician-Administered Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder scale scores (Raskind et al., 2016). That team proposed that additional studies with a larger sample were needed to test the intervention's effectiveness for military and civilian populations who experience post-traumatic stress disorder (Raskind et al., 2016). Another example of civilian and military research collaboration is the development of the Compensatory Reserve Index to assess for hemorrhagic shock after a traumatic injury (Galvan, 2017; Stewart et al., 2016). These successful partnerships illustrate that continued research collaborations are essential to fully address the health needs of service members and their families.

Collaborative research agreements between the U.S. military and academic institutions have a number of

unique requirements. As military and academic nurse researchers interested in developing collaborative research efforts, we found little guidance in the literature on the best practices for building successful collaborations between military and academic researchers in clinically focused applied research. In this article, we provide an overview of military-specific requirements for academic and military researchers interested in pursuing military health and well-being research collaborations. In addition, we present two case studies of successful collaborations between academic institutions and the U.S. Air Force (USAF). Finally, we discuss the opportunities and challenges researchers may experience in such collaborations. These case studies provide examples of important issues for military and academic nurse researchers to consider when establishing a collaboration.

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## Where to Start

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### Resources for Military Research Funding

Researchers may begin by searching for military-specific grant funding opportunities. Most researchers are familiar with the [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) Web site that allows one to view and apply for federal grants. Although this Web site lists most Department of Defense grants, military-specific research Web sites should also be reviewed. For example, the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (<http://cdmnp.army.mil/>) web page provides information for priority research programs receiving congressional appropriations. Researchers are able to search this Web site for current and upcoming research opportunities and apply for available funding.

Opportunities may also be found via not-for-profit foundations, such as The Geneva Foundation (<http://genevausa.org/>) or the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine (<http://www.hjf.org/>). Finally, funding resources may be available for specific military occupations. For example, goals of the [TriService Nursing Research Program \(2016a\)](#) include promoting nursing research to address unique or critical health needs of military service members and enhancing research collaborations and partnerships.

### Finding a Research Collaborator

If the academic investigators have not already identified a military counterpart, potential collaborators may be found via an Internet search. One potential web page that can be explored is maintained by the TriService Nursing Research Program (<https://www.usuhs.edu/tsnrp/>). By searching this Web site, researchers can find useful information, including the names of the current members of the TriService Nursing Research Program Advisory Council who serve as service branch consultants and contact information

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