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May 30, 2003

NATIONAL OFFICE
Executive Vice President
Robert B. Greenberg

Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Principi:

The American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) is the nation's oldest, not-for-profit specialty medical society, consisting of over 13,000 gastroenterologic physicians and scientists who are involved in research, clinical practice and education on disorders of the digestive system. I am writing to you on behalf of the AGA and its members who are distinguished investigators involved in Veterans Affairs (VA) medical research regarding a major concern that has come to our attention.

The AGA is deeply concerned over the recent actions of Nelda Wray, MD, the VA's chief research and development officer, to "defund" 17 basic research grants verbally promised to experienced scientific investigators. Such an action threatens the integrity of the strong peer review process for which VA research and other robust scientific programs are well known.

As a scientific investigator, I am certainly appreciative and supportive of bold and innovative new approaches to scientific inquiry. However, the use of mathematical models such as "productivity scores" threaten the credibility of the VA medical research program and may well stifle innovation. At the very least, the VA will face the loss of many of its best and brightest scientists who were initially attracted to the VA due to its reputation in this area of research.

There are numerous other potential repercussions of Dr. Wray's decision. Scientific reviewers who have sacrificed and volunteered numerous hours to selflessly review such grants cannot help but be demoralized. This action also demonstrates a disregard for the contributions of long-term VA investigators who have improved the lives of our veterans (and the entire U. S. population) through research and clinical care. In addition, the ability of the VA to attract high quality subspecialists, who have a commitment to both clinical care and research, to care for veterans (already a recognized problem) will be seriously hampered.

As the U.S. turns again to its dedicated men and women in the military to protect our country from terrorism and other threats, this has become one of the most significant eras in decades to strengthen our commitment to the highest quality care for our

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veterans. Unfortunately, Dr. Wray's actions are contrary to ensuring that the VA is well equipped to offer the best in research based medical care to our veteran population. Therefore, I ask that Dr. Wray's decision to "defund" the 17 research grants be overturned and that the VA consider convening a panel of distinguished basic and clinical scientists to develop a more comprehensive road map for the future of VA research and its funding.

Thank you for your consideration of AGA's concerns on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Podolsky', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel K. Podolsky, MD
President

cc: Sen. Arlen Specter
Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV
Sen. Christopher Bond
Sen. Barbara Mikulski
Honorable Christopher Smith
Honorable Lane Evans
Honorable James Walsh
Honorable Alan Mollohan
Mr. Doug Badger