

Subject: VA COVID-19 Research Biorepositories/Biobanks

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: May 1, 2020

From: Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD, Chief Research and Development Officer

Subj: VA COVID-19 Research Biorepositories/Biobanks

To: VA Facility R&D Services and VA Investigators

1. The scientific community across the world has rallied to address the COVID-19 pandemic, which has a scale that has required new approaches by the research community. I have been so heartened by the overwhelming response of VA investigators to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal in central office is to create a system in which each of you can make an impactful contribution.

2. Specimens from SARS-CoV-2 infected and COVID-19 convalescent patients are incredibly valuable resources for research on diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines. As one of the nation's largest integrated healthcare systems, we have an opportunity to contribute to VA, our country, and the world. Here in central office, we have been working with major national efforts, such as those based at the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) that rely on the availability of biospecimens. In order to support the many investigators who we have in our research program, I envision a sample collection network that will provide samples to VA and other high-priority initiatives from a coordinated biorepository system.

3. To accomplish this, I have established a working group to quickly develop a plan for a VA COVID-19 Biorepository System, funded and supported by ORD, which will be capable of state-of-the-art specimen storage, management, and distribution for research purposes. I will need your help in accomplishing that objective.

4. First, we will work with VHA national laboratory leaders to identify how we can preserve remainder clinical specimens from COVID-19 infected patients until they can be shipped to a biorepository. Second, if your facility has capacity to serve as a central, or one of a small network of VA COVID-19 biorepositories, please let us know at ORDCOVID19@va.gov. Finally, I am asking for some of you to serve on an oversight board that will manage the sample collection and quickly review requests to use the samples for research projects, please let us know at ORDCOVID19@va.gov.

5. I understand that I am asking for individual investigators to prioritize our collective impact through a shared COVID-19 biorepository over having your own for local research. By working together, we will give all investigators access to larger numbers of samples covering a wider array of patients.

6. As we work to establish the VA COVID-19 Biorepository System, ORD is committed to assuring that appropriate biosafety precautions are taken at existing for VA biorepositories with biospecimens from patients with COVID-19. For this reason, the Office of Research and Development will require that VA facilities that have already established or plan to establish VA research biorepositories with biospecimens from patients with COVID-19 report those collections

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to ORD. Please report any established or planned biorepository at https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vacovhacomm/ORD_Surveys.

The VA research community has been incredible in its response to the pandemic. I am so proud and grateful for your service to Veterans, the nation, and the world. Please stay well.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel B. Ramoni". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot above the 'i' in "Ramoni".

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD