

The VA hospital system affords unique opportunities for medical research. As President Johnson stated in his message of January 30, 1968, the gain made from VA research makes it one of the nation's best investments. Its professional resources and facilities have not only improved veterans' care, but have contributed to American medicine as a whole. The history of the contributions of veterans' medicine to the conquest and alleviation of disease and disability is gratifying. Particularly noteworthy are the contributions to tuberculosis control and mental disease control. Without the VA's support in prosthetic device research, the situation might well be abysmal.

While the Commission fully supports the VA medical research program and recommends expansion, it believes that mission oriented research should receive primary consideration and emphasis. The magnitude of the psychiatric load in VA hospitals indicates the need for a much greater allocation of research in this area of care. The problems of aging which now account for approximately one-third of VA admissions, require continuing and accelerated research effort.

The Commission wishes to emphasize the need for accelerated research and application of methods for treatment of alcoholics. In addition to an expanded research program in this field, we would like to see alcoholic treatment centers established for veterans.

The Commission is deeply concerned over the possibility that the VA hospital system could develop into two classes of hospitals having disparate quality levels of care. The very nature of research effort is the establishment of centers of excellence. Talented researchers gravitate towards these centers which in turn receive greater financial support and thereby attract even more researchers. There is no question that these medical centers furnish the highest level of patient care.

Our concern lies with the VA hospitals which are isolated from these stimulating influences, both professional and budgetary. The Commission feels that the VA can, by the very nature of its organizational structure and capacity for leadership, apply imaginative approaches to raising the level of professional competence at these hospitals. Immediate and dynamic research is required to improve the delivery of the highest quality medical care to all veteran patients regardless of where they may be hospitalized.

Some stimulation may come from the newly developing regional medical centers. The Commission believes,