

## **NIH Office of Intramural Research (OIR)**

### **Career Development for Staff Clinicians at NIH**

*October 5, 2017 (Modified on July 26, 2023)*

A Staff Clinician is a physician or dentist who spends the majority of their time providing critical patient care services and is expected to provide clinical leadership and the highest level of clinical care. The Intramural Research Program (IRP) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recognizes the important roles that Staff Clinicians play in the success of our clinical research program in each Institute/Center (IC), their unique and highly specialized clinical skills and the significant contributions that have been made by this cadre of physicians. In order to more fully reflect the varied and vital roles that our physician-scientists have, such as providing highly specialized clinical care or leading complex patient-care teams to carry out complicated research trials, and to provide resources to clinical staff to carry out their responsibilities, this document specifies how the new position levels established in 2016 — Assistant Research Physician, Associate Research Physician, and Senior Research Physician — will be augmented by new authorities and clarifications of the role of the Staff Clinicians. While the official NIH Intramural Professional Designation (IPD) will remain “Staff Clinician,” these alternative IRP titles may be used, if preferred, in professional correspondence, websites, and CVs. Advancement to Associate and Senior Research Physician will require formal endorsement by the IC Clinical Director (CD), and sign-off by the NIH Deputy Director for Intramural Clinical Research (DDICR). Any Staff Clinician who is a primary investigator on a clinical protocol or devoting more than 10% of time to independent research activities must have this research reviewed on a quadrennial basis by an IC BSC or equivalent process. All new titles will be registered with and recorded by the DDICR and in the Office of Intramural Research (OIR). Part-time Staff Clinicians who have a 50% or greater full-time equivalent (FTE) position are eligible for and required to be given the title of Assistant Research Physician, and eligible to be nominated for the title designations of Associate Research Physician or Senior Research Physicians. Since Staff Clinicians must be NIH employees, contractors or Special Volunteers are not eligible for the title series. Please see the NIH Sourcebook for additional details about the NIH Staff Clinician position.

#### **Assistant Research Physician**

Staff Clinicians approved for the level “Assistant Research Physician” are individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to excellence in clinical practice, including attention to patient safety, clinical research or education and who possess the ability to integrate teaching and scholarship on an ongoing basis into the practice or learning of medicine and science. This title will be granted upon hiring after execution of a Staff Clinician Agreement. The “Assistant Research Physician” title will be given with the expectation and understanding that the designee will pursue a trajectory of accomplishments that could lead to the subsequent attainment of Associate Research Physician with the ultimate goal of Senior Research Physician. For the title of Assistant Research Physician, the only requirement is an executed Staff Clinician Agreement. This agreement must be signed by the Staff Clinician, their supervisor, and the Clinical Director (CD) for the IC of their primary appointment. It is expected that the Staff Clinician Agreement defining the responsibilities of the Assistant Research Physician will include travel for two scientific meetings, including one meeting for continuing medical education purposes.

**Associate Research Physician**

Staff Clinicians approved for the level “Associate Research Physician” are individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to excellence in clinical practice, clinical research and/or education and who possess the ability to integrate teaching and scholarship on an ongoing basis into the practice or learning of medicine and science. At this level, the physician is expected to have taken on leadership roles in the IRP (or have leadership experience at their prior institution), be knowledgeable in the development and conduct of clinical research trials as demonstrated through a successful track record of implementing trials or completed training in areas related to human subjects research and be active in the professional community. This position is envisioned as equivalent to an “Associate Professor” in the academic clinical educator track in outside academic health centers.

Among the factors that will be considered, but are not all mandatory for the level of Associate Research Physician, are:

- significant role(s) within a quality clinical research program;
- scholarly achievements in scientific publication;
- delivery of quality patient care with attention to patient safety over an extended period of time to protocol participants as an Attending Physician or through a consult or diagnostic service;
- serving as a resource on the conduct of human subject research trials, including service on an Institutional Review Board (IRB), Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB), or service as a voting member of search committees;
- major role(s) in the development and execution of multiple high quality clinical research protocols;
- leadership role(s) in the IC or NIH (e.g., IC Protocol Concept Reviewer, service on IC national search committees or other task forces or committees);
- significant role(s) in professional community activities such as national meetings, professional organizations, and extramural collaborations;
- major role(s) in the training and mentoring of clinical staff;
- receipt of NIH or IC award(s);
- additional exceptional factors that are added by and reflect the special character of the IC with the approval of the DDICR.

The Associate Research Physician will have a Staff Clinician Agreement negotiated with their supervisor and Clinical Director, that specifies the distribution of their work time between clinical care, research activities, and teaching responsibilities, and indicates the resources available for conduct of research and the extent of their independence. This Staff Clinician Agreement will specify funding for travel of the Associate Research Physician to at least two scientific meetings including at least one meeting for the purpose of continuing medical education.

The Associate Research Physician can be the principal on Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs) and Material Transfer Agreements (MTAs) and apply for grants if consistent with the time allotted to clinical research activities and with supervisory approval to initiate these activities. For Associate Research Physicians who primarily provide clinical care, quality of clinical care and/or teaching will be paramount, with no expectation of research accomplishments.

### **Senior Research Physician**

Staff Clinicians approved for the level “Senior Research Physician” will be considered national or international leaders in their field. At this level, physicians are expected to be active leaders in the IC (e.g., IC Advisory Board, IC Protocol Concept Review chairperson, service on IC national search committees, branch Fellowship Program Director/Associate Director, or have been active leaders in their prior institution), to actively mentor other clinical staff and/or to develop and serve as PI of one or more clinical research trials. These individuals will have stature such that they are called upon as experts by outside institutions, are invited to give seminars at research institutions and national meetings, hold important roles in professional organizations, or serve on grant study sections. This position is envisioned as equivalent to that of a “Full Professor” in the academic clinical educator track in outside academic health centers.

In addition to the factors considered for Associate Research Physician as listed above, the following additional factors will be considered for advancement to this level:

- have received an “Outstanding” rating on the **two** most recent Quadrennial Reviews or BSC Reviews (*For Staff Clinicians who have had only one BSC or Quadrennial Review, an “Outstanding” rating on the most recent BSC or Quadrennial Review and outstanding or exceptional national or international recognition for additional services [i.e. National, international, or life-time achievement award for quality patient care, clinical research, education curriculum development or mentoring, or committee service from a recognized association or organization] or provision of crucial and exceptional service to the IC on which the function of the IC IRP is critically dependent may be considered.*);
- be seen as a national or international expert in the field, held in high regard by peers, as evidenced by such factors as being consulted by others inside and outside of NIH, invitations to speak at important professional meetings, receipt of national/international awards, or leadership role(s) outside of NIH in the extramural community, or high-quality clinical research publications. Appointment as a Senior Research Physician does not require major independent research accomplishments, but in such instances, outstanding clinical skills and recognition for these are expected.

The Senior Research Physician will have a Staff Clinician Agreement negotiated with their supervisor and Clinical Director that specifies the distribution of their work time between clinical care, research activities, and teaching responsibilities, and indicates the resources available for conduct of research and the extent of their independence. This Staff Clinician Agreement will specify funding for travel of the Senior Research Physician to at least three meetings including a meeting or meetings for the purpose of continuing medical education and will allow the Senior Research Physician to be the principal on CRADAs and MTAs and apply for grants if consistent with the time allotted to clinical research activities and with supervisory approval to initiate these activities.

## **Guidance for Request for Conferral of Status**

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All Staff Clinicians must receive titles outlined herein within 60 days of appointment as a Staff Clinician. For the Assistant Research Physician title, the only requirement is an executed Staff Clinician Agreement signed by the Staff Clinician, their supervisor, and the Clinical Director for the IC of their primary appointment. (The role of the Scientific Director in agreements and title nominations may be determined by each IC.) Assistant Research Physician agreements are to be executed within the IC and then must be filed with OIR for record keeping within 60 days of position start, or earlier, when feasible.

To initiate a title nomination for the Associate and Senior Research Physician titles, the supervisor of the Staff Clinician, in conjunction with the Lab/ Branch Chief or Deputy Chief, and the Clinical Director, will nominate each Staff Clinician for referral to the IC panel that reviews Staff Clinicians. The makeup of this panel is described in the plan submitted to the DDICR by each IC. This panel will make a recommendation to the IC's Clinical Director and Scientific Director. By this mechanism, the review of Associate and Senior Research Physician requests will require additional endorsement by the IC Senior Leadership Team and by the DDICR. A Staff Clinician's supervisor, with support of the Lab/Branch Chief, may request consideration of advancement as part of the quadrennial review process with all supporting documentation or may make the request independent of the quadrennial review. Of note, if a title nomination package is submitted in conjunction with hiring a Staff Clinician or with supporting documentation from a quadrennial or other review, a memo indicating the specific criteria for the title must still be written.

For the Associate Research Physician title, three letters of reference are required, one of these letters must be from a non-collaborator. For the Senior Research Physician title, three letters of reference from non-collaborators who are outside of the NIH are required.

Recognition as Associate Research Physician or Senior Research Physician must be specifically approved by the IC panel that reviews Staff Clinicians, the IC's Clinical Director, and approved by the DDICR. The DDICR may accept guidance from the Staff Clinician Title Review Committee (SCTRC).

Without specific approval of this status, it is not conferred. If a Staff Clinician is not recognized by this process and disputes that decision, the Staff Clinician may consult with the DDICR to seek an alternative dispute resolution to determine if there was a procedural error resulting in the decision by the IC not to advance the Staff Clinician.

All requests to designate a Staff Clinician title for an Associate or Senior Research Physician must include:

1. A memo addressing the supporting elements which meet the criteria for the desired title, including whether or not 100% FTE (or state the percentage if less than 100% FTE), attesting as to whether the referees are non-collaborators as indicated or of equal or higher standing as the nominated title, and if for senior, outside of the NIH;
2. An updated CV and bibliography;
3. Reference letters (NOTE: A collaborator is one who has made an intellectual contribution regarding the planning and conduct of experiments, clinical trials or original research publications within the last five years, with the exception of one who has merely shared reagents, patient samples, or whose name appeared on a common publication only as a result of consortia participation). The referees must be of equal or higher academic standing as the requested title, e.g., nominations for 'Associate Research Physician' require referees at the rank of Associate or Full Professor, while nominations for 'Senior Research Physician' would require referees at the rank of Full Professor, in the academic 'Clinical Track' and/or 'Clinician Educator Track' at outside academic medical centers. This must be stated in the memo.):

- Associate Research Physician – Three letters of reference, one of these letters must be from a non-collaborator. Letters must be solicited by the IC.
- Senior Research Physician – Three letters of reference from non-collaborators who are outside of the NIH. Letters must be solicited by the IC.

### ***External Candidates***

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Prior to the new appointment of a Staff Clinician, the availability of the position must be advertised, and the selecting official must explain in a memo why the selectee has been chosen, with sign-off approval by the Clinical Director and the Scientific Director of the IC. A Staff Clinician being hired from either inside or outside of the NIH must be appointed as an Assistant Research Physician within 60 days of hiring and until the title of Associate Research Physician, or Senior Research Physician has been approved via the title nomination package process outlined above.