

Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Spinal Cord Research Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes – 09/20/2023

- WELCOME
  - Deputy Secretary Iqbal welcomed all Committee members, DOH staff, and members of public to the meeting.
  
- ROLL CALL / QUORUM CONFIRMATION AND INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND DOH STAFF
  - Attending members of SCARC confirmed their participation:
    - Dr. Benjamin Abramoff
    - Dr. Amanda Harrington
    - Matthew Berwick
    - Melissa Pitts
    - Dr. Itzhak Fischer
    - Dr. Joel Winer
    - Dr. Guy Fried
    - Dr. Zarina Ali
    - Sean Ferry
  
  - Quorum requires attendance of a majority of 5 members. The meeting had a quorum.
  
  - Attending staff from Department of Health also confirmed their participation:
    - Lindsey Walsh
    - Will Cramer
    - Galen Graham
    - Sylvia Golas
    - Pam Brown
    - John Krahel
    - Caroline Grimm
    - Denise Jenkins
    - Rodeen Lechleitner
    - Keith Fickel
    - Dan Myers
  
  - Attending members of public also confirmed their participation:

Jake Chaffin, Alex Charlton, Matthew Rodreick, Jake Beckstrom.
  
- RECORDING OF THE MEETING
  - Announcement was given that the meeting would be recorded by a stenographer and by continuing to be on the call all participants were agreeing to being recorded.

Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Spinal Cord Research Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes – 09/20/2023

- REVIEW AGENDA
  - The agenda for the meeting was listed as follows:
    - New Member Introductions
    - Review of Functions of Committee Members and the DOH
    - Annual Meeting Cycle
    - SFY22 Spinal Cord Funding Update
    - SFY23 Spinal Cord RFA Status
    - Approval of April 10<sup>th</sup> 2023 meeting minutes
    - 2024 priority discussion
    - New business / further discussion of the meeting.
    - Opportunity for public questions or comments
  
- WELCOME NEW MEMBERS
  - All members of SCRAC were given the opportunity to introduce themselves, by giving their organization, title, and why they were interested in serving on the committee.
  
- REVIEW OF FUNCTIONS OF COMMITTEE AND DOH
  - A PowerPoint presentation was shared with all participants via screen share.
  - Topics and information shared included: Spinal cord research legislation, legislation about committee members (appointments, terms, member role) priority selection process, RFA process, grant review process, and grant award process.
  - Dr Abramoff raised the question of SCRAC used to participate in application review, why is SCRAC no longer reviewing applications. Referenced the SCRAC charter stating the legislation allows for SCRAC review.
  - Deputy Secretary Muneeza Iqbal and Attorney Keith Fickel explained the conflict of interest, procurement process, and that they cannot speak to what previous administrations had done however this administration was not allowing advisory committees to review applications.
  - Ms. Pitts agreed with Dr. Abramoff – also referenced the SCRAC charter as legislation and said SCRAC was allowed to review applications per the statute.
  - Deputy Secretary Iqbal stated she would take their questions and concerns up to the executive offices.

Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Spinal Cord Research Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes – 09/20/2023

▪ ANNUAL MEETING CYCLE

- Deputy Secretary Iqbal explained to meet legislative requirements, we would be holding two meetings per year, once in spring and once in the fall. Starting in 2024, the function of the spring meeting is to be the collection of public feedback and for committee members to present potential research priorities. Between spring and fall, committee members should work on developing potential priorities into white papers. During the fall meeting, the white papers will be presented by the committee members and voted on for the following fiscal year priority.
- Deputy Secretary Iqbal went on to explain to get back on track with this timeline, in 2023 the current meeting will be used to take public feedback, discuss potential priorities, and use the time between today's meeting and the spring meeting to develop white papers. The spring meeting will then occur as mentioned in the 2024 year.

▪ SFY 22 RFA 67-153 SPINAL CORD APPLICATIONS FUNDING DECISION

- Deputy Secretary Iqbal informed SCRAC that the SOH had reviewed the application scores and peer review feedback from the DOH's Vendor, ORAU, and that the SOH had decided not to fund this year's applications.
- It was stated the applications did not score high enough to meet the standards applications were held to, and that as a result this year's funds (an amount of one million dollars) would be rolled into next year's RFA – bringing the total amount for the 2023 Spinal cord RFA to two million dollars.
- Dr. Abramoff expressed concerns of the application process – its complexity and the timeline of the review of applications, along with the amount of time awards took to be given to successful bidders.
- SCRAC was told that application processes are standard for state government – internal effort is being made to bring RFA timeline back into normalcy.

▪ MEETING MINUTES REVIEW AND APPROVAL

- Meeting minutes from April 10, 2023 were distributed to SCRAC prior to the meeting for review in order to approve minutes.
- Committee member Ms. Pitts asked for clarification on what the approval of minutes would mean – Attorney Keith Fickel explained it is a record of what was discussed at previous meeting.
- Motion to approve the meeting minutes was made by Dr. Abramoff, Dr. Harrington gave second motion.

Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Spinal Cord Research Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes – 09/20/2023

▪ SCRAC 2024 RESEARCH PRIORITIES

- SCRAC members voted on having the 2023 priorities kept the same. The research priorities have been the same since the inception of SCRAC in 2019.
  - Dr Harrington brought up a question about the history of DOH's prior involvement in research priorities related to care, access to social programs, and the transition from institutional care to at home care programs.
  - There was discussion on what the actual legislation said about research priorities and what the guidelines within the legislation speak to about what kind of research should be funded.
  - Attorney Keith Fickel read from the statute aloud to SCRAC members, that the funds were “to be used for new and innovative treatments and rehabilitative efforts for the functional improvement of people with spinal cord injuries.”
  - Dr. Abramoff spoke that the intention of those who helped develop the legislation was to research physiological and functional recovery. Melissa Pitts agreed to that point.
  - Matthew Berwick brought up a question related to priority discussion – “if it was the purpose of the legislation to only look at curative research, why wasn't it written that way?” Both Dr. Abramoff and Ms. Pitts discussed their intention as people who helped create was to focus on curative research.
  - Deputy Secretary Iqbal suggested that as there were multiple ideas floating around for priorities, to have members of the committee form white papers for next meeting to be voted on. She also stated a member of the DOH would disseminate templates of white papers to the committee.

▪ PUBLIC COMMENTS

- With time running out for the meeting, Dr. Abramoff asked to open up the meeting to members of the public for comment or question.
  - Matthew Rodreick brought up his history with legislation and why the word “cure” was not used in the legislation surrounding SCARC. He brought up why he thought SCRAC members should be reviewing applications, and brought up his concerns of applications being too complicated for researchers to bother to apply.

Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Spinal Cord Research Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes – 09/20/2023

- Deputy Secretary Iqbal thanks Matthew for his thoughts and time, notes that it is just past 11:00am and there is no time left in the meeting, and calls for a committee member to end the meeting.
- Abramoff says there are additional members of public who should like to speak.
- Deputy Secretary Muneeza reminds all that to be respectful of everyone's time she will be sticking to the schedule and asks for an end to the meeting.
- Matt Berwick motions to end the meeting.
- Melissa Pitts seconds the motion to end the meeting.
- Deputy Secretary Muneeza Iqbal Thanks everyone for their time and tells committee members to look for an invite on their calendars for next meeting in February by the end of next week.