

CSR News Flash

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Center for Scientific Review
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Scarpa to Step Down as CSR Director

Late yesterday, Dr. Toni Scarpa announced he will retire as Director of the Center for Scientific Review (CSR). CSR receives all and reviews most of the over 80,000 grant applications researchers send to the National Institutes of Health each year. He will remain director until the beginning of September.



“My six years at CSR were exhilarating,” said Dr. Scarpa. “I was privileged to serve in a period of unprecedented changes and opportunities in peer review. Thanks to a dedicated staff and reviewers, CSR excelled during this time, reviewing 50 percent more applications in addition to 40,000 applications for federal stimulus funds two years ago. This was only possible due to a shared passion and unfailing commitment to the quality and efficiency of peer review.”

During his tenure, CSR succeeded in doing more with less. “CSR now saves \$35 million a year,” he said, “by using innovative electronic review platforms that reduce travel cost, providing non-refundable airline tickets to our reviewers, sending applications and meeting materials electronically rather than on paper or CDs, and holding meetings on the West Coast once a year where many reviewers live.”

“Toni brought imagination, innovation and not a little artistry to the otherwise pedestrian, yet vital process of peer review,” said Dr. Garret FitzGerald, associate dean for translational research at the University of Pennsylvania and member of CSR’s advisory council. “His enthusiasm infected those of us who interacted with him in the academic community, and as a result of his efforts, we have a more transparent, efficient and fair process, so important in this era of constrained resources.”

Dr. Scarpa played a significant role helping NIH design and implement the first major changes to NIH peer review in 65 years. He specifically led CSR efforts related to:

- Implementing the trans-NIH Enhancing Peer Review changes, including shorter applications, new scoring, a realigned review criteria and summary statement format, and the new limit on the number of times an applicant can submit an application.
- Dramatically shortening the review cycle.
- Inaugurating the order of review approach to focus review meeting discussion on the most meritorious applications.
- Initiating a continuous application submission program to incentivize members of study sections and 3,100 frequent reviewers for their continued service.

While at CSR, Dr. Scarpa led efforts to reorganize CSR’s review groups in five review divisions to maximize efficiency and ensure their respective study sections adequately cover the evolving fields of science. As part of this process, CSR hired five division directors, 12 integrated review group (IRG) chiefs, and more than 100 scientific review officers.

To enhance the quality of study section performance, CSR conducted a series of open houses and ongoing IRG reviews to seek community input for improvements and realignments of its study sections. Each year, over 10 study sections were realigned to enhance the quality of their performance.

Dr. Scarpa instituted a number of new initiatives to advance best practices with the peer review community here and abroad:

- Conducting full-day orientation sessions on best practices for more than 575 new study section chairs.
- Developing on-line reviewer training including videos, slide sets and new Web pages
- Soliciting volunteer reviewers from every society and institution with which CSR has contact
- Providing outreach on peer review philosophy and practices to thousands of colleagues and ministries of a dozen countries
- Training new reviewers and deliberately seeking “Early Career Reviewers” from less research-intensive institutions to expand NIH’s pool of reviewers.

A more complete list of CSR accomplishments during his tenure is posted on CSR’s Web site: [CSR Accomplishments 2005-2011](#).

Dr. Scarpa came to NIH from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, where he was the David and Inez Myers Professor and chair of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics. He received his M.D. and Ph.D. (Libera Docenza) in general pathology from the University of Padua School of Medicine, Italy.

About CSR: CSR organizes the peer review groups that evaluate the majority of grant applications submitted to NIH. These groups include experienced and respected researchers from across the country and abroad. Since 1946, CSR’s mission has been to see that NIH grant applications receive fair, independent, expert, and timely reviews — free from inappropriate influences — so NIH can fund the most promising research. CSR also receives all incoming applications and assigns them to the NIH institutes and centers that fund grants. For more information, go to CSR’s Web site—<http://www.csr.nih.gov>—or phone 301-435-1111.

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit <http://ww.nih.gov>.