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**Two VA Scientists Honored with Awards for Groundbreaking Work on Spinal
Cord Injuries***William A. Bauman, M.D., and Ann M. Spungen, Ph.D Awarded 'Sammies'*

WASHINGTON – In the past, spinal cord injuries often meant a death sentence for patients – not because of the injury itself, but because of the complications caused as a result of the injury. But thanks to the work of two Veterans Affairs scientists and researchers at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), many paralyzed Veterans now have a reason for hope. And a way to live.

Last night, William A. Bauman, M.D., and Ann M. Spungen, Ph.D., Director and Associate Director of VA's Rehabilitation Research & Development National Center of Excellence for the Medical Consequences of Spinal Cord Injury were awarded the prestigious Samuel J. Heyman Science and Environment Medal, also known as the "Sammies."

The Science and Environment Medal is awarded to federal employees who have made a significant contribution to the nation. The pair of VA researchers, who have been working together for a quarter of a century, were recognized in a ceremony in the Andrew Mellon Auditorium in Washington, D.C. VA Secretary Robert McDonald presented Bauman and Spungen their awards.

"Many of our facilities perform groundbreaking work, which serves as a model for healthcare research across the nation," said Secretary McDonald. "I am proud of William and Ann. Any research institution would be proud to have these leading scientists, but they have chosen to dedicate their careers to serving Veterans at VA, and we are proud to call them our own."

In 2001, Bauman and Spungen established the VA's Rehabilitation Research & Development National Center of Excellence for the Medical Consequences of Spinal Cord Injury in Bronx, NY, where Spungen most recently tested a new bionic walking assistance system that enables individuals with paralysis to stand, walk, and climb stairs.

As part of their collaboration, Bauman and Spungen have made great progress in understanding the effects of spinal cord injury on the body. Their work led to the conclusion that persons with spinal cord injury are at a markedly increased risk for heart disease. They were also the first to describe, and then treat, an asthma-like lung condition common in those with higher levels of paralysis. They have developed approaches to make it easier for paralyzed patients to undergo

successful colonoscopies. With other researchers in their unit, Bauman and Spungen formulated novel drug combinations to raise low blood pressure, and they have overseen the development of treatments to reduce bone loss shortly after spinal cord injury. Their work has advanced our understanding and treatment of chronic, non-healing pressure ulcers. Researchers under their direction also are making strides toward improving understanding of body temperature regulation and the effect of swings in body temperature on one's ability to think.

Bauman has worked at the Bronx VA hospital for 35 years, starting in the laboratory of the late Rosalyn Sussman Yalow, VA physicist and Nobel Prize winner. Bauman said he made up his mind from the start to devote himself to patients with spinal cord injury who, at the time, were largely marginalized and overlooked by physicians with training in general medicine.

"I would say our center's greatest accomplishment has been to identify problems in persons with spinal cord injury that no one had appreciated prior to our work, and then to develop successful approaches to solve them," Bauman said. "Prior to our work, many of these problems were not realized to be important, or were ignored because it seemed that nothing could be done to improve them."

Spungen said she can recall being captivated by the sense of civic duty pervading Bauman's energetic sphere of medical research activity at the hospital.

"I got to the VA and met these incredible scientists and investigators who were here working for the Veterans and who were so intelligent, so open, and so kind. I just became enamored with the entire atmosphere and dug in, and I have been here ever since," Spungen said.

Robert Ruff, national director for neurology at the Department of Veterans Affairs, said the work of Bauman and Spungen has had a wide-ranging impact. "The research is relevant not only to people with spinal cord injury, but to a larger population who are immobilized, from those with ALS to cancers, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, dementia or Parkinson's disease," Ruff added.

The Service to America Medals are presented by the [Partnership for Public Service](#). This year, eight award winners were chosen from 33 finalists and almost 400 nominees. The 2014 selection committee included CEO Alberto Ibarguen of the Knight Foundation, Maryland Senator Benjamin Cardin, and Georgetown University President John DeGioia.

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