

Lewis-Burke Best Practices: Attending the Military Health System Research Symposium

The [Military Health System Research Symposium](#) (MHSRS) is the Department of Defense's (DOD) premier, annual medical research meeting. The joint symposium offers a unique opportunity for interested researchers to engage with program managers and DOD officials, who are often hard to reach virtually without a prior connection, on military biomedical and health-related research topics. Thematic tracks and previous discussions range broadly, but typically include topics such as infectious disease, TBI, psychological health, and injury prevention, among others.

Registration for the in-person MHSRS opens in June of each year, and the symposium is usually held every August in Florida. This document provides additional information and best practices for those attending and/or presenting at the MHSRS. Lewis-Burke is also happy to work with interested researchers to align their research with DOD's interests in the time leading up to the MHSRS.

Attending the MHSRS

The MHSRS is an expansive event, ranging over four days with thousands of attendees from DOD, other federal agencies, academia, and the private sector. It is critical for interested researchers to utilize their time at the symposium wisely to ensure the best chances of productively engaging with program managers and funding entities. Below are best practices for productively attending the MHSRS.

- **Understand Best Days and Events to Engage:** The MHSRS facilitates events, such as an all-symposium reception on the first day and networking lunches throughout the week, for attendees to engage with DOD officials and program managers outside of presenting an abstract. Utilize these events to network and establish relationships in and outside of DOD.
- **Visit Booths of Relevant Funding Agencies:** Every DOD funding entity, such as the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) and US Army Medical Research and Development Command (USAMRDC), operates a booth staffed by program managers and leadership. Understand what funding entities align with your research and visit those booths to establish a connection (Lewis-Burke can provide recommendations ahead of the conference). Even if your connection's focus area does not align with your research, they will likely be able to connect you with someone that does.
- **Attend Targeted Breakout Sessions:** Breakout sessions are held throughout the MHSRS and focus on a wide variety of topics, including the presentation of DOD-funded research in specific research areas and engaging with the DOD Health system. Plan which breakout sessions to attend in advance of the symposium that align with your interests to become more informed on DOD's interests in your research area and how to engage successfully with appropriate DOD officials.
- **Follow-up with Program Managers (Post-Conference):** Success with DOD health funding is largely dependent on relationships with program managers. Lewis-Burke recommends following up via email with program managers following the event to discuss your specific research ideas. It is best to send a one pager or quad chart when requesting a follow up meeting (Lewis-Burke can provide examples).

Presenting an Abstract at the MHSRS

While attending the MHSRS allows interested researchers to access DOD health program managers and officials, Lewis-Burke recommends submitting an abstract of proposed research to better facilitate engagement with program managers that support specific types of research topics. The call for abstracts to present at the MHSRS is typically released in January or February and closes about one month later.

Two types of abstracts are accepted:

1. **Research Abstracts:** “Include data and conclusions formatted as: Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Conclusions.”
2. **Advanced Product Development:** “Focus on mature efforts/technologies supporting the filling of an existing DoD capability gap and should be formatted as: Introduction, Capability Description, Methods/Technical Approach, Results, Applicability to Medical Roles of Care, Impact to the Warfighter/Significance, Developmental Status of the Technology.”

Researchers should align the topics of their abstracts with one of the symposium’s abstract-driven breakout sessions, which can be found [here](#). Additional information, including the abstract submission process and frequently asked questions, can be found [here](#).