My laboratory at UConn Health has received a $3.5 M grant from the Department of Defense, Congressionally Mandated Health Research Program to develop an electrophysiological test for tinnitus (ringing in the ears). Hearing loss and tinnitus are the third most common chronic health condition in the world, and many citizens in Connecticut suffer from these conditions. However, there is no treatment for tinnitus and no diagnostic tool that can be used in drug development. Our research involves both animal studies and testing on human subjects who are patients in the Division of Otolaryngology and suffer from hearing loss and/or tinnitus. Both clinical and basic science faculty are funded by this project as is other translational research that occurs in both the research laboratory and clinical medicine settings.

It is essential that our public medical school and hospital remain together in the same institution for a number of reasons. If John Dempsey Hospital were private, funding to the University would have to be diverted to the private institution as a subcontract to pay for our human subject testing. This would be undesirable since it is not clear that academically trained physicians would be available as collaborators, and our costs may increase if we must contribute to liability insurance in the private setting. It would require duplicate human subject protocols and monitoring that may be problematic for a private institution that is not fully committed to academics and research. Moreover, a private institution may be unwilling to provide the facilities and support necessary for our advanced audiological testing since research may be seen as unprofitable. So, a private setting for our clinical research on human subjects might be a disaster and cost much more than keeping it all within the public umbrella of the University.

Staffing of this project depends totally on the funding from the Department of Defense. All costs for salary and fringe benefits are born by the grant. The costs of salary and fringe benefits are a major factor in determining the number and quality of the research and clinical staff for our project and the salaries they receive. State cost-sharing for fringe benefits is highly desirable since it will free up funds on the grant. This will allow us to use higher, more competitive salaries to attract the best and brightest researcher staff, and it allows increased staffing levels on the project. In both cases, it will make new discoveries, new inventions, and new therapies more likely at UConn Health.