Study leader Dr. Mark S. Litwin, Associate Professor of Urology and Health Services and researcher at UCLA’s Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, said the effort represents the first coordinated attempt to detail the significant burden of a variety of urologic diseases that strike American men, women and children.

"The burden of urologic diseases on the American public is immense in both human and financial terms, and it has never been fully documented before," said Litwin. "This work will frame the current debate on this issue. It will provide a valid foundation for public discourse."

The five-year, $6.9 million grant to UCLA comes from the National Institutes of Health and will be administered by the Division of Cancer Prevention and Control Research at UCLA’s Jonsson Cancer Center. Urologic diseases include conditions that are congenital and acquired, cancerous and non-cancerous and affect both males and females. The study will focus on urologic cancers, such as prostate cancer, bladder cancer, testicular cancer and kidney cancer, but also will examine high-profile disorders such as male sexual dysfunction and urinary incontinence, Litwin said.

"The Urologic Diseases in America project is very important for the medical community, the research community, the Congress and, most importantly, the citizens of the United States. It will be the first time that there is a clear definition of the social, economic and health care burden of the urologic diseases," commented the NIDDK Project Officers: Leroy M. Nyberg, PhD, MD, Director of the NIDDK Urology Program, and Paul Eggers, PhD, Director of the NIDDK Urologic Epidemiology Program.

The information gleaned from the study will be critical to the allocation of resources at the national, state and local levels, Litwin said. An exhaustive nationwide search will be conducted for data on urologic diseases from such sources as the National Center for Health Statistics, Medicare and Medicaid, state and county organizations, private foundations and published literature. Researchers will study current and retrospective data on all aspects of care, including costs trends, changes in physician practice patterns, patient demographics, outcomes, length of hospital stays, outpatient resources, pharmaceutical use and the availability and type of insurance coverage.

At the conclusion of the study, researchers will provide a report in written and electronic (CD-ROM) formats for use by legislators, health care professionals and policy makers and the public.

"We know of no comparable work in progress anywhere in the United States," Litwin said. "We hope to produce a comprehensive compendium of health information on urologic diseases."

"Urologic Diseases in America will bring together health services researchers and clinicians from
across the country to define the burden of the major urologic illnesses on the national population,” said Dr. Christopher Saigal, UCLA Assistant Professor of Urology and Co-Principal Investigator of the project.

The study will be led and coordinated by Litwin at UCLA, while data analysis will be done at RAND by a team of statisticians, epidemiologists, a health economist, a communications specialist and programmers. Researchers from the VA Greater Los Angeles HSR&D Center of Excellence, a consortium of investigators from Veterans Affairs campuses at UCLA, the University of California, San Diego, and RAND, will provide epidemiological consultation and conduct the epidemiological and health services research analyses of VA data.