

# CSRD February Newsletter

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**CLINICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT**

**VA**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development

## Terri Talks

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### Message from the Director

February means of course we are turning the corner into our Spring review round, with applications to CSRD due in the next few days. One clarification we have been working on is to make sure the field knows the expectations and requirements within our Requests for Applications (RFAs). With an eye towards ensuring everyone's application meets the specific eligibility to submit, requirements including Letters of Intent, are now summarized: [https://www.research.va.gov/services/shared\\_docs/resources.cfm#2](https://www.research.va.gov/services/shared_docs/resources.cfm#2). We continue to ask applicants to reach out to their Scientific Program Manager to ensure their study aims are well aligned with a specific RFA before they submit to us for funding.

We are also quite busy in planning efforts (described below) where CSRD and investigators are working together collaboratively on studies of high priority interest for advancing treatment and studies that are particularly complex in terms of design aspects. Your Scientific Portfolio Manager can also help direct that activity with you if you have any questions about planning resources.

Lastly, we will continue to emphasize the importance of suicide prevention for everyone, along with our need/interest in developing more effective evidence for prevention and interventions. All ideas and suggestions are welcome, as this is everyone's business. One evolving webpage, that is being generated by HSRD SPRINT, is also a good resource: <https://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/centers/core/sprint.cfm>.

### CSRD Studies in Planning Stages

CSRD has several study planning activities that we want to inform the field about as general information as well as potentially avoiding applications that may overlap. We'll continue to update as efforts are added. Current studies approved for planning:

- Ketamine/esketamine. Two trials are being planned using esketamine – one focused on suicide prevention and one focused on major depressive disorder.
- Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB). Testing of SGB for treatment of PTSD is in the very early planning stages.
- A new expansion of the Million Veteran Program will focus on recruitment efforts directly in mental health clinics. Called MVP-MIND, this infrastructure is being planned following a pilot test of the targeted assessment, with the overall goal to lead to more in-depth understanding of mental health in Veterans.

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## HBCU Core

Congratulations to the Atlanta VA for being awarded CSRD's first Core Recruiting Site (CRS). The purpose of the CRS is to increase the participation of individuals associated with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) into the VA Career Development research program. This program will be a pipeline that will support the recruitment and retention of applicants associated with Morehouse University for the BLRD and CSRD Career Development Award program. This program provides a mentored experience in research and training that will lead to a career as a VA researcher. Drs. Michael Hart, the ACOS at Atlanta VA, and Walter Royal at Morehouse University will be the executive directors of the program. They have worked hard to develop a program that CSRD believes will be successful. The program will launch March 1, 2020.

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## Highlight: Bruce Montgomery, M.D.

Dr. Bruce Montgomery is a co-lead for the Precision Oncology Program for Cancer of the Prostate (POPCAP) -- a partnership between VA and the Prostate Cancer Foundation. The goal of precision oncology is to deliver the most appropriate cancer treatment to patients based on their genetic profiles. Using genetic testing, clinicians hope to select treatments that are targeted to specific cancer mutations, helping patients to live better-quality lives. Dr. Richard Stone, the Executive in Charge, has identified precision oncology as a major area of focus for VHA. Dr. Montgomery is a staff physician and researcher at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle. He is also a Professor of Medicine, Oncology, and Urology at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. Dr. Montgomery's recent webinar was widely viewed and can be accessed in TMS (Course 41204).

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## Congratulations

Congratulations to all Career Development Awardees who have completed their projects and transitioned to independence as VA investigators. Those with CSRD Merit Review Awards :

- Subhajit Chakravorty, M.D., Philadelphia VA Medical Center, "The Efficacy of CBT-1 in Alcoholics & Its Effects on Remission & Relapse"
- Miranda Lim, M.D., Ph.D., VA Portland Health Care System, "Sleep-wake disturbances in traumatic brain injury"

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## CDEA Applications Encouraged

Applications are encouraged for the Career Development Enhancement Award (CDEA) for senior VA investigators to obtain additional research training, acquire new knowledge or skills, and enhance their research programs. This award for senior VA scientists is open to both non-clinicians and clinicians. It will provide up to 6 months of salary and combined with local support

for 6 months offers the opportunity for a 1-year "sabbatical." For additional information see <https://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.cfm>. For required Letter of Intent information see [https://www.research.va.gov/services/shared\\_docs/career\\_dev.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/services/shared_docs/career_dev.cfm).

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## VA Research Week May 11-15

Every year, VA Research convenes, highlighting activities about exciting local research at our Medical Centers. CSRD welcomes the opportunity to participate at local facility events during this week, and would ask that you contact us at [VHABLRD-CSRD@va.gov](mailto:VHABLRD-CSRD@va.gov) if there is local interest in our staffing any of your planned events.

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## CSRD Staff Highlight: Jana Drgonova, Ph.D.

Jana Drgonova, Ph.D., joined CSRD in 2019 as a Scientific Program Manager. Her portfolio includes projects focused on alcohol and substance abuse, pain, and animal models of mental health disorders. She is currently developing a research program on medical marijuana, cannabinoids and synthetic compounds that act on the endocannabinoid system. Jana came from the Center for Scientific Review, National Institutes of Health, where she oversaw the Neurotoxicology and Alcohol Study Section as its Scientific Review Officer. Prior to joining CSRD, she was an intramural staff scientist at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, where she studied molecular, genetic, and cellular mechanisms of drug addiction. Dr. Drgonova earned her Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Slovak Technical University, studying cell morphogenesis and focusing on the role of small GTP-binding proteins in cell cycle progression and cell polarization.

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## Please Meet and Greet Us

Here are a few places, CSRD staff will be over the next few weeks and months:

- TBI-Suicide Collaborative Research Meeting, March 10-11, at Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center
- Society of Biological Psychiatry (SOBP) Annual Meeting April 30-May 2 in New York, New York
- 43rd Annual Research Society on Alcoholism Scientific Meeting/International Society for Biomedical Research on Alcoholism Congress June 20-24 in New Orleans