**Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes**
**Monday, March 21, 2022 – 1:30 pm ET**

**Internal Teams Site:  Click Here**

1.  **Welcome**                                         Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD

Dr. Ramoni welcomed attendees and highlighted the agenda.  Items included ones related to the research enterprise transformation to be presented by leads of the respective initiatives.

2.  **ORD / Research Enterprise**                     Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

• **Enterprise transformation initiative updates**

Dr. Huang provided a brief update on the VA Research Enterprise transformation efforts.  In previous calls, several of the nine transformational initiatives underway were described including Mr. Laracuente's HR Centralization effort, that will enable ORD to operate as a Research Enterprise.  On the call, a Research Enterprise SharePoint site was announced that will host resources designed to keep the Field informed about the progress of the initiatives and the wider Research Enterprise transformation.

The SharePoint is available at: https://dvagov-my.sharepoint.com/personal/subul_malik_va_gov/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Fvacovhacomm%2FORD%2DResearch%2DEnterprise%2FShared%20Documents&listurl=https%3A%2F%2Fdvagov%2Esharepoint%2Ecom%2Fsites%2Fvacovhacomm%2FORD%2DResearch%2DEnterprise%2FShared%20Documents#

Further questions, concerns, or feedback about the SharePoint, the Research Enterprise can be submitted through the feedback form and email address.  Any feedback submitted through the feedback form will be anonymous while messages sent through the email will enable us to respond to your questions and concerns directly.  The anonymous feedback form is available at: https://tinyurl.com/ResearchEnterpriseFeedback.  The feedback email address is: VHAORDResearchEntFb@va.gov.

• **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

In association with an Executive Order (EO) about Artificial Intelligence (AI) use case tracking in the U.S. Federal Government, Research Administrative Offices were asked to remind their investigators to complete the survey on AI use cases distributed via email by

Liza Catucci, MPH, Acting Director of Operations, Office of Research and Development (ORD), on March 14th and March 21st.  Survey responses are being collected by the National Artificial Intelligence Institute (NAII)/ORD who is responsible for responding to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) data call for this information.  **Surveys must be completed by 5 p.m. EST on March 21st.**

- **AIR Commission**                                          Alex Chiu, Ph.D.

MISSION Act of 2018 requires VHA to assess its 95 healthcare markets and develop a set of recommendations to modernize its health care system.  The assessment is now completed and SecVA presented the VA recommendations to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission on March 14.  Those recommendations are now available on https://va.gov/AIRCOMMISSIONREPORT

In addition, SecVA also requested in-depth analyses to assure that VHA's missions on education, research, and innovation would be protected, if not strengthened, as a result of the recommendations to the AIR Commission.

As Dr. Carolyn Clancy has pointed out in her message to the staff of Discovery, Education and Affiliated Networks, with changing care delivery, research will also evolve to develop new opportunities and to face new challenges.  However, in the immediate future, the work of the AIR Commission will have only minimal impact on Veterans' services or employees.  Any closure or relocation of major facilities will be years away.

ORD will monitor closely the AIR Commission activities and engage stakeholders in discussion of potential impact on R&D programs locally.  ORD will partner with program staff in those facilities most affected to develop strategic plans to mitigate the impact from proposed closure or relocation, and even to reposition the local program for growth.  The key to the success of that partnership is better communication between local program staff and ORD.

We welcome your comments and questions.  Please send them to Grant and Alex.

3. **Technology Transfer Program (TTP) updates**    Ryan Davis

- TTP is currently in the process of hiring a new Regional Tech Transfer Specialist (TTS), an MVP/AI-focused TTS in Boston, and several Field TTS positions at various VA Medical Centers.

- Sophia Tech Transfer Database

  o Received Cloud ATO last April and have been working with vendor to configure for VA processes.
  o VAMC Research leaders (e.g. ACOS/Rs and AOs) have user accounts to access info on all inventions, patents and T2 agreements associated with their MCs.

- o Currently, it is running a pilot to test online disclosure and certification forms and automated routing workflows. Planning to fully implement online disclosure/certification by end of FY 22.
- o TTP is working with ORD Services to add VA project info to database in order to link funding to inventions/IP, agreements and royalties. Creating accounts for SPMs and ORD Service personnel to check for inventions associated with award applicants and other info.
- o Future plans – (1) provide limited access to affiliates or work with vendor to build interface between VA and affiliate databases, to streamline reporting between VA and affiliates; (2) integrate with external data sources, e.g. USPTO; (3) leverage automation to streamline and simplify/consolidate DOR process.

- Royalties – Less than halfway through the fiscal year, TTP achieved a new record in annual royalties at over $6M. This is the downstream effect of all the improvements and increase in activity that has happened over the last five years or so, especially the increase in staffing with Field TTS, and royalties should continue to ramp up in future years.

4. **Research Protections & Policy**                 Angela Foster

- VAIRRS Strategic Advisory Council (VSAC)

The VAIRRS program is in the process of forming the VAIRRS Strategic Advisory Council (VSAC) that will be responsible for advising the program on strategic initiatives.

The goal of the VSAC is to ensure 1) we are meeting the needs of our end-users and 2) the impact of strategic initiatives on the field are understood and considered prior to implementation.  A kick-off meeting is expected in May.

If you would like to nominate a member of your staff to serve on the VSAC, please submit your nomination through the VAIRRS SharePoint portal.  The direct link to the nomination form can be found in last week's edition of the VAIRRS Newsletter or you may email VAIRRS@va.gov.  All nominations require supervisor's approval.

5. **Finance Updates**                 Matthew Verna

- FY22 BUDGET

- o The FY22 Budget was enacted on Tuesday, March 15 for the full requested amount of $882M with no rescission. This is approx. $87M more than what was provided for the FY21 budget. ORD has received an initial 30-day allotment, so we have begun distributing funds out to the field. The remaining funds will take a couple of weeks to come down from OMB and VHA. We are planning to distribute the full CC101 funding from the first 30-day apportionment, so these funds should be the first to arrive on station. The remaining funds will be used to cover equipment and other research priorities.

- Field Execution

  o To effectively manage the FY22 budget, ORD will be monitoring field execution very closely. We have been operating under a CR environment for almost 6 months. With half of the fiscal year remaining, and a fully funded budget, we cannot afford obligation delays. Request field offices work to improve execution as much as possible.

- Other Announcements

  o The FY23 Budget will be released by the Administration on Tuesday, March 29th.
  o On April 6, ORD will be hosting a training on the FY22 and FY23 Budget.

## 6. ORD Field Update

o **IT Updates**                                                   Carl Grunfeld, MD, PhD

The Endpoint program renames computers, as computers are the endpoints on the VA network. My laptop was renamed with RL in front of the number. RL stands for Research Laptop. Desktops, workstations and servers will be named RW. Research Scientific Computing Devices will be names RD.

The key message is that it is advantageous for everyone doing research to have their computer in the Research "R" series even if they are clinicians.

The intent of the naming convention is to clearly identify computers, so they may be properly managed.

By designation a computer as research we hope to: 1) prevent OIT updates from interrupting long computations and machine runs; and 2) decrease the removal of research-specific software that is not uniform on all VA computers.

R&D Offices were encouraged to be broad in indicating whose computers are included.

The OIT guidance to reginal IT will be applied to all endpoints connected to the VA network regardless of Operating System (OS), such as Windows, Linux, Mac, etc.

With data being stored on computers, externa hard drives, servers and the Cloud, we now need to assure there will be access to the data if someone leaves or dies. For now, that must be a local concern, as most researchers do it individually. We will be working on best practices, policies and an SOP.

o **Updates on Section 209**                                       Tony Laracuente

- ePROMISE:  Changes are coming soon to minimize the input fields.  This change is expected over next 6 months.

- WINRMS upgrade:  Critical upgrade is occurring; it will need to be updated via a process sent to the field by email last week.  It will update Pay Calendar and sort group error.

- Field Enterprise Research Services Support Contract:  The rollout will be slightly delayed by a few days to ensure that a workflow error in Sharepoint is corrected. An announcement will go out when it is open for requests.

- WOC:  Thanks were expressed to all stations that provided input to address the onboarding of WOCs.

7. **Results of the VA-DOE Concept Proposals Review** Suma Muralidhar, PhD

The review of the concept proposals submitted in response to the VA-DOE joint research RFA has been completed. We received 60 proposals. Proposals were reviewed by the appropriate VA ORD Services, DOE scientists and the VA National Artificial Intelligence Institute (NAII).  Proposals were first evaluated for clinical significance, data availability, need and appropriateness for high performance computing, clinical applicability and overall feasibility.  Eight concepts were selected to move forward as follows.  Congratulations to the applicants selected!

| PI | Station | Title |
|---|---|---|
| Joseph, Jacob | Boston, MA | Artificial Intelligence to Resolve Heterogeneity of Heart Failure with Preserved Ejection Fraction and Enable Precision Care |
| Beckham, Jean | Durham, NC | Clinical Application of Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing and High Performance Computing to Improve Prediction of Suicide Risk Among Veterans |
| Fanous, Ayman | Phoenix, AZ | Elucidating Genetic and Environmental Risk Factors for Antipsychotic-induced Metabolic Adverse Effects Using Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning |
| Luoh, Shiuh-Wen2 | Portland, OR | Applying large-scale multi-modal machine learning to understand the complex symptomatology of post-acute COVID-19 sequelae for risk assessment and clinical management. |
| Reaven, Peter | Phoenix, AZ | Dynamic Prediction of Short-Term and Long-Term Diabetes Complications Leveraging Massive Electronic Health Records, Million Veteran Project, Machine Learning/Artificial Intelligence, and High-Performance Computing |

| Boudreau, Eilis | Portland, OR | Reducing Cardiovascular and Metabolic Morbidity: Deep Phenotyping of Obstructive Sleep Apnea, a Model for Targeted Treatment for Modifiable Risk Factors |
| Green, Michael | Ann Arbor, MI | Utilizing machine learning approaches to improve Veteran lung cancer care |
| Aguayo, Samuel | Phoenix, AZ | A multi-omic predictive model of lung cancer risk |

## 8. Services updates and announcements

- **RR&D Updates**                                              Patricia A. Dorn, PhD



Please join me in welcoming Ms. Janelle R. Altman to ORD/RR&D! She is RR&D's new Program Analyst within our Program Analysis and Review Section.

Janelle R. Altman, BSc has been with the Department of Veterans Affairs for the past 20 years.

She began her career at the Pittsburgh VA Medical Center in the Financial Management Section, transitioning throughout the VAMC to the Surgical Service, Patient Care Services, Quality and Patient Safety for VISN 4, Executive Assistant to the VAMC Chief of Staff, and most recently as the Business Manager of Research and Development, where she has spent the past 5 years.

Her career has provided her with a unique chance to work on a wide variety of projects along-side skilled professionals and mentors, taking advantage of every opportunity to learn and grow. She was also assigned to several details in Central Office in Washington, DC and has traveled to multiple VAMCs, leading a VISN-wide Patient Safety project.

She is thrilled to stay a part of the VHA Research Community, as she quickly became fascinated with the opportunities that Research brings to the Veterans and the behind the scenes work that it takes to get there. Janelle enjoys traveling, playing cards/games, and spending time with her family - including her dog Roxi "the doxi" (dachshund/doxen) who is always by her side. She looks forward to working and getting to know everyone!

- o **Paul B. Magnuson Award Nominations:**

The Paul B. Magnuson Award is presented annually to a VA RR&D investigator who exemplifies the entrepreneurship, humanitarianism, and dedication to veterans displayed by Dr. Magnuson during his career. The award was established in 1998 in recognition of the importance of rehabilitation research within the VA Health Care System. The award

consists of a one-time $5,000 cash award to an individual, $50,000 per year for three (3) years supplemental funding for their ongoing peer-reviewed research, and a celebratory plaque.

Nominations for the 2023 Paul B. Magnuson Award are being accepted through September 1, 2022. Please refer to Program Guide 1203.06 and the Instructions for Preparing and Submitting a Nomination Packet.

- o Review Updates:

SCIENTIFIC REVIEW TIMELINES (refer to applicable FOA/RFA for details):
Please continue to contact RR&D for guidance and to ask questions.

*Winter 2022 - Merit, Career Development and Research Career Scientist*:
- o Scientific Review – February 22 thru March 2, 2022
- o Scores released – March 3, 2022
- o Summary Statements released – March 25, 2022
- o Intent-to-Award notifications – by early April 2022

*Spring 2022 – SPiRE:*
- o NEW RFA published – December 17, 2021
- o Pre-application (LOI and waiver request) submission deadline – February 1, 2022
- o Full award e-application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – March 10, 2022
- o An updated version of the Biographical Sketch Format template (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (**Rev. 10/2021 Approved Through 09/30/2024**)) will be required for application submissions starting January 25, 2022
- o Scientific Review – April 20, 2022
- o Scores and Summary Statements released – May 12, 2022
- o Intent-to-Award notifications – Late May 2022

*Summer 2022 – Merit, Career Development and Research Career Scientist:*
- o Summer 2022 RFAs to be published by April 1, 2022
- o Pre-application (LOI and waiver request) submission deadline – May 2, 2022 (as May 1 falls on a Sunday)
- o Full award e-application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – June 10, 2022
- o Biographical Sketch Format template (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (**Rev. 10/2021 Approved Through 09/30/2024**)) is required for all application submissions
- o Scientific Review – August 8-16, 2022
- o Scores released – August 18, 2022
- o Summary Statements released – September 9, 2022
- o Intent-to-Award notifications – late September 2022

*Summer 2022*

- o *Developing and Validating Alternatives to the Use of Canines, Felines and Non-Human Primates in VA Research (I01): RFA RX-22-032* **–** published February 10, 2022.
    - **9.** Follows Summer 2022 timeline noted above
    - The goal of this two-phased RFA is to develop and validate alternative methods to the use of sensitive species (e.g., non-human primates (NHP), canines and/or felines) in research. VA RR&D investigators currently funded to conduct sensitive species research are eligible to apply.
    - VA-ORD acknowledges the need for basic and translational research relevant to Veterans' conditions in appropriate models and the parallel need to reduce or eliminate the use of sensitive species.
    - The alternative methods (i.e., animal models not involving sensitive species, mircrophysiological systems, in vitro systems, in silico models and research involving human subjects) model should be outcome-driven, to determine successful establishment to the comparator model.
    - This RFA will support initial model development (phase one) and if successful, followed by a second phase of model validation.
    - To ensure their proposed area of research meets the intent of this FOA/RFA, investigators are strongly encouraged to consult RR&D program purview and portfolio descriptions on the RR&D website and contact the listed Scientific Program Manager (SPM) relevant to their area of study.

*Spring 2023 - Center and Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP):*
- o NEW RFAs published – March 3, 2022
- o Webinar – April 20, 2022, 12 noon: This webinar will include an overview of the funding mechanism, what RR&D is looking for and a Q&A session. Please send questions in advance to Dr. Shirley Groer ([Shirley.Groer@va.gov](mailto:Shirley.Groer@va.gov)).
- o Pre-application and List of Key Personnel submission deadline – September 1, 2022
- o Full award e-application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – January 11, 2023
- o Biographical Sketch Format template (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (**Rev. 10/2021 Approved Through 09/30/2024**)) is required for all application submissions
- o Scientific Review – April 2023
- o Scores and Summary Statements released – April/May 2023
- o Administrative Review/Site Visits – May/June 2023
- o Intent-to-Award notifications – Subsequent to site visit


- **HSR&D Updates**                                   David Atkins, MD

- o Cross service RFA on Post COVID Impacts: We approved 9 of 15 LOIs and are expecting to review a total of 25 projects in 9 separate programs. CSRD has 11 projects, the remaining 14 are distributed among the other 3 services.

- HSR&D is hosting a 2-day virtual meeting with the Office of Rural Health on Monday -Tuesday, March 28-29 to help update our rural health research agenda. HSR&D expect to incorporate that into a call for proposals this fall.

- SMRB: Our funding meeting from the March round will be held April 4; we hope final funding decisions will be released the following week.

  Updated RFAs for the June cycle will be posted this Friday. Please consult updated research priorities document. Cyberseminar reviewing the RFAs will be held Thursday March 31 at 1 pm EDT.

  Intent to submit window is open April 22 - May 6.

- Under Secretary for Health Award for Health Services Research: Applications open until April 8. Please considering nominating your most accomplished researcher in HSR.

- COIN Program Manager Position: GS -14 virtual position, providing scientific oversight of 18 COINs. Position closes March 28.
  https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/642851100

- **BLR&D Updates**                                        Christopher T. Bever, Jr., MD

o <u>New Scientific Portfolio Manager Introduction</u>

It is with great pleasure that BLRD welcomes Dr. Shakeria Cohen, Ph.D. She received her Masters of Clinical Science and Ph.D. from the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta before joining the Million Veterans Program as a AAAS Fellow. For the next six months she will be working with Dr. Block supporting the military exposures program and with Dr. Fowler supporting the pulmonary and nephrology portfolios.

o <u>Spring Review Round</u>

The Spring round has started, and the stations are reminded that any questions should be directed to the review manager, Dr. Michael Burgio.

o <u>New Funding Opportunity</u>

BX-22-032 Developing and Validating Alternatives to the Use of Canines, Felines and Non-Human Primates in VA Research (I01) has been posted. Submission deadline for the Spring Round is March 10, our standard submission date.

o <u>Middleton Award nominations</u>

BLRD received 8 Middleton nominations from the field. The Middleton review panel will convene on April 28th, 2022. POC: Kimberlee.potter@va.gov

o   Opportunity for Student Veterans extended

March 25th – Extended deadline for *Research Experience for Student Veterans in Advanced Manufacturing and Entrepreneurship (*REVAMP) at Georgia Tech for Veteran Students. See attached flyer.

o   Biofabrication Symposium

May 4-5th – 1st VA Symposium on Biofabrication will take place virtually and is jointly sponsored by ORD and IE to engage biofabrication researchers, practitioners, visionaries, and innovators to grow VA's biofabrication efforts. POC: Kimberlee.potter@va.gov and Beth.Ripley2@va.gov Registration link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2G2LL5Z

o   Clinician Scientist Award program

June 29th – Deadline for the receipt of Clinician Science Investigator (CSI) nominations for clinician scientists with competitive BLRD renewal applications submitted for Spring 2022. POC: Kimberlee.potter@va.gov Weblink with nomination instructions: https://www.research.va.gov/services/blrd/csi.cfm

o   VA SHIELD Update

Dr. Krull announced the awarding of the VA SHIELD administrative coordinating center under the leadership of Dr. Robert Bonomo.


10. **CSR&D Updates**                                    Miriam Smyth, PhD

o   Spring Review Round

Receipt and referral in in process for the Spring review round. Investigators are reminded not to contact Portfolio Managers about their submissions. All questions should go to the review manager, Dr. Michael Burgio (Michael.Burgio@va.gov).

o   Upcoming submission opportunity

Suicide Prevention Research Clinical Resource Center. LOIs due April 1. Full proposals due July 13. Contact is Dr. Joseph Constans. Joseph.Constans@va.gov

o   Update on the Post COVID Conditions Collaborative Merit Award

Full proposals due April 14 only for studies that already have an approved LOI. CSRD is expecting 11 proposals for individual projects that are part of programs involving cross-service collaborations.

**11. <u>Remembering an ORD Colleague</u>**

ORD sadly announced the unexpected passing of Mitch Mirkin who had served in various capacities for ORD Communications, including most recently as the Acting Director for ORD Communications.  Mitch was strongly dedicated to the VA research mission and was an expert writer who helped highlight a number of ORD accomplishments, VA investigators and overall impacts made by VA research.  He was a key part of making the VA research program and its results more highly visible to Veterans and the public through a number of venues.  In addition to his communication skills, he was an accomplished musician who further conveyed his commitment to Veterans through this media.  His professionalism and storytelling abilities along with his kind and gentle demeanor will be greatly missed by his ORD colleagues and those who had the opportunity to work with him.