



A monthly newsletter dedicated to informing and strengthening the VA Research Community - December 2021

Message from the CRADO

Dear VA Research Community,

Traumatic brain injury is an important cross-cutting clinical priority for VA Research. TBI is often referred to as the “signature injury” of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each year, VA sees 100,000 patients with a TBI diagnosis. Symptoms can include headaches, sleep disorders, cognitive deficits, and depression. With so many Veterans affected by this condition, understanding how TBI affects the brain and finding the best treatments is of paramount importance.



We are bringing our broad research enterprise to bear on this important aspect of Veterans’ health. The Long-term Impact of Military-relevant Brain Injury Consortium – Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium ([LIMBIC-CENC](#)) is a great example of what can be accomplished by collaborative research.

LIMBIC-CENC is a multicenter collaboration linking basic science, translational, and clinical neuroscience researchers from VA, the military, and academia to address the long-term effects of mild TBI, or concussion.

CENC was created in 2013, headed by Virginia Commonwealth University. CENC has carried out research on the biological mechanisms behind chronic TBI, comorbidities, and the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation strategies, among other areas. Multiple VA centers and outside organizations have been involved in CENC research over the years.

LIMBIC was launched in 2019, building on the success of CENC. A major feature of LIMBIC is a multi-year study of 3,000 to 5,000 Veterans and service members to better understand the long-term impact of TBI. LIMBIC is creating an epidemiological database of military and VA health records, disability assessments, and other administrative data on more than 2 million Veterans and service members. Data from this program are now [available](#) for VA researchers to access.

Through collaboration, LIMBIC-CENC has improved our understanding of TBI. The consortia made valuable research and clinical contributions to VA/DOD clinical practice guidelines on TBI. Among other findings, LIMBIC-CENC research demonstrated that many symptoms and disorders associated with mild TBI are risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease, dementia, and neurodegeneration.

In 2021, LIMBIC-CENC unveiled web-based and portable clinical support tools through its [Knowledge Translation Center](#). These tools will aid



[Policy/Admin Updates](#)



[Resources and Opportunities](#)



[Noteworthy Publications](#)



[Media Buzz](#)



[Upcoming Events](#)



[Achievements and Milestones](#)

clinicians in managing their mild TBI patients and those suspected of having greater susceptibility to develop mild cognitive impairment, dementia, or other neurodegenerative diseases.

Through collaboration among many VA sites and outside organizations, LIMBIC-CENC is focusing the considerable assets of VA data and our outstanding personnel to tackle one of the most pressing medical issues faced by Veterans. Much credit is due to Dr. David Cifu, who leads LIMBIC-CENC, along with the many investigators working on this important research. Dr. Cifu was awarded the 2021 Magnuson award for his contributions to the understanding of TBI. In line with one of our top strategic objectives, this team is helping to put VA data to work for Veterans.

With gratitude,

Rachel

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD
Chief Research and Development Officer (14RD)
Department of Veterans Affairs



Policy/Admin Updates

Last day to complete VAIRRS project cover sheet—The VAIRRS team greatly appreciates everyone’s help as the VAIRRS enterprise strives to establish a standardized, more efficient program for researchers. To provide optimal benefit, the VAIRRS Project Cover Sheet Wizard for each project must be completed by tomorrow, **Dec. 15, 2021**.

Your project’s contribution to the thousands of Project Cover Sheets already submitted will help reach the goal of a 75% completion rate by Dec. 15. The more Project Cover Sheets submitted, the more robust the enterprise will be in efforts to support each research office.

New Research Information Security and Cybersecurity Toolkit—The VA Office of Information Security has developed and launched a Research Information Security and Cybersecurity Toolkit. The new toolkit is designed to equip VA Research stakeholders with the resources needed to securely conduct research and ensure the protection of both Veteran research-subject information and research data. The toolkit helps research stakeholders discover educational resources, including research tools, templates, bulletins, information, policy guidance, webinars, best practices, and FAQs. The **VHA Regulatory Research Cybersecurity Guidance**

ServiceNow Catalog (ServiceNow yourIT) portal can be accessed via the [Research Support Division \(RSD\) Guidance Resource SharePoint Portal](#) (VA network access only). Further information can be found in the [OIS Bulletin #429](#) (VA network access only).

Update on Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM)—The ORD Strategic Initiative for Research & EHR Synergy (OSIRES) is working with the [Office of EHRM](#) and Cerner to provide enterprise level and site-specific support for Research’s transition to VA’s new electronic health record (EHR), Cerner Millennium.

- The VA Millennium EHR has been deployed at the **Mann-Grandstaff VAMC in Spokane, Washington**, since Oct. 24, 2020.
- **VA conducted a 12-week strategic review of the EHRM effort to address implementation issues and inform future site transitions.** The [Comprehensive Lessons Learned \(CLL\)](#) report (released July 2021), the [CLL Progress Update](#) (released Dec. 1, 2021), and a recent VA

[press release](#) describe challenges identified through the review and proposed changes to the management and governance structures of the EHRM project, including the establishment of a program executive director for EHR Integration, a deputy chief information officer for EHR, and a significantly strengthened VHA Office of the Functional Champion.

- **The CLL Progress Update includes an updated deployment schedule.** Deployments are planned throughout VISNs 10 and 20 in calendar year 2022, with additional sites in VISNs 12 and 23 in calendar year 2023.
 - Columbus will be the next VHA facility to go live, with deployment anticipated in March 2022.
 - The first major research facilities—Puget Sound, Ann Arbor, and Portland—are anticipated to deploy in the fall of 2022.
- **OSIRES' [EHRM and Research](#) page** of the *Research Resource Guide* maintains information about the EHRM, its impact on research, and ORD-sponsored activity related to the transition, as well as links to additional information and resources. Information specific to VA Millennium data can be found on the VA Information Resource Center (VIRc) web page, [EHRM & Implications for Data Users](#).
- Contact the **OSIRES HelpDesk**, ResearchEHRMHelp@VA.gov, with questions or concerns.



Resources and Opportunities

Research Supplements to Promote Diversity—A new [funding opportunity](#) for early-stage investigators from underrepresented backgrounds is now accepting applications. The supplement award will provide a mentored research experience for early career scientists from underrepresented populations, such as individuals from racial and ethnic groups underrepresented in health-related sciences on a national basis, individuals with disabilities, U.S. Veterans, and LGBTQ+ persons. It will provide salary and project funds for up to two years.

Individuals mentored under the supplement must be within three years of their doctoral degree or their last clinical training if the mentee is a licensed clinician. The primary mentor must be an appropriately qualified VA investigator with an active Merit Award. All VA medical centers with an active research program are eligible. Only one supplement request per medical center will be accepted per year. It is anticipated that up to 10 awards will be funded. Applications are due through grants.gov by **Feb. 1, 2022**.

A [webinar](#) on the supplement will be held on Thursday, **Dec. 16, 2021**, at 2:30 pm EST.

Summer Research Program to support diversity—ORD is piloting a Summer Research Program to enhance the diversity of the research workforce by providing research experience and related opportunities to enrich the pool of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including nationally underrepresented groups, Veterans, and disabled individuals. The pilot will support creative mentored research experience for community college and undergraduate students or medical, dental, nursing, and other health professional students.

Initial appointments will be for one and three months between May and August of 2022. This will be a three-year pilot with opportunity for renewal. For more information, contact Drs. Cendrine Robinson (cendrine.robinson@va.gov) and Mark Roltsch (mark.roltsch@va.gov). Letters of intent should be submitted to vhaoorddeiwig@va.gov by **Jan. 6, 2022**. Full proposals are due by **Jan. 31, 2022**.

Post-COVID conditions collaborative Merit RFA—The purpose of this RFA is to invite applications for collaborative I01 projects from multi-disciplinary teams to advance the current state of understanding for biomedical, clinical science, health services, and rehabilitation research related to post-COVID conditions. This RFA is a co-announcement across all VA ORD Research services and encourages collaboration among investigators along

the translational pathway, either within service or across services. See the [RFA documents](#) (VA network access only) for more information.

New Pain CORE website—The goal of HSR&D's Consortia of Research (CORE) is to accelerate research that will lead to measurable improvements in the care delivered to Veterans in specific VA priority areas, including pain management, opioid prescribing, and opioid use disorder. To increase understanding of the work conducted by the Pain/Opioid CORE, a new [website](#) is now online. For pain/opioid researchers who focus on Veteran populations—whether or not they work at a VA facility—the site provides valuable resources and information including:

- Details about the CORE's Rapid Start funding program.
- An overview of the Veteran Engagement Panel—a resource to facilitate more Veteran-engaged pain/opioid research.
- Descriptions of the four Pain/Opioid CORE workgroups, which are open to all interested VA investigators.

In addition to the new site, [an overview](#) of the Pain/Opioid CORE is available, and for those with VA intranet access, the Pain/Opioid CORE maintains a [VA Intranet site](#) that includes a collection of linked, limited-access intranet sites for CORE workgroup collaboration.

Research in Action call for submissions—All VA research is intended to ultimately contribute to the health and well-being of Veterans. VA [Research in Action](#) highlights examples of how VA research has been translated into everyday health care within VHA or in medical care generally.

We are looking for VA projects to highlight that have had substantial, lasting impact on health care across the country and globe. If you know of a VA accomplishment that you think would be a good candidate for this feature, please contact Tristan.horrom@va.gov with details.



Employment

HSR&D recruiting Capacity Building Program Manager—HSR&D anticipates recruiting for the position of Capacity Building Program Manager (GS-14). This position is responsible for managing HSR&D's 18 Centers for Innovation (COINs) and is an exciting opportunity to work with HSR&D leadership to determine how to support and direct this flagship program of HSR&D. The manager will be responsible for refining the strategic direction of these centers to determine how they collaborate with clinical partners and other COINs, with the goal of getting their research into practice in VA. The position is virtual and involves travel. If interested, contact naomi.tomoyasu@va.gov.

- (12/08/21) [Health Science Officer/Associate Chief of Staff for Research \(Physician\)](#)- Mather AFB, CA
- (12/06/21) [Health Sciences Research Specialist/Coordinator, Core Team](#)- Seattle, WA
- (12/03/21) [Data Knowledge & Data Documentation Specialists \(Social Science Analysts\)](#)- Hines, IL

- (12/03/21) [Communications Specialist \(Social Science Analyst\)](#)- Hines, IL
- (11/29/21) [Digital Product Manager](#)- Remote/Telework position
- (11/29/21) [Biostatistician](#)- Hines, IL
- (11/29/21) [Statistical Programmer](#)- Hines, IL
- (11/19/21) [Study Coordinator \(Behavioral Sleep Medicine/Implementation Science\)](#)- Pittsburgh, PA
- (11/15/21) [Database Administrator/Programmer](#)- Seattle, WA
- (11/12/21) [Health Sciences Research Data Analyst](#)- Seattle, WA
- (11/12/21) [Programmer/Analysts](#)- Pittsburgh, PA
- (11/10/21) [Health Sciences Project Manager – VETR Team](#)- Seattle, WA
- (11/09/21) [Tenure Track Implementation Scientist Faculty Position](#)- Ann Arbor, MI
- (11/09/21) [Director, HSR&D Center for Innovation to Implementation, VA Palo Alto/Stanford University](#)- Palo Alto, CA
- (11/08/21) [Research Librarian](#)- Remote/Telework position
- (11/05/21) [Health Sciences Research Assistant/Specialist/Coordinator – SHADE Study](#)- Seattle, WA
- (11/05/21) [Data Manager](#)- Boston, MA
- (11/05/21) [Senior Faculty: Health Services Research](#)- Houston, TX
- (11/05/21) [Deputy Director - Million Veteran Program](#)- Boston, MA

More VA Research opportunities can be seen on the [ORD website](#). Members of the VA Research community who are interested in advertising their available positions here can submit requests to ORD.Web@va.gov.



Noteworthy Publications

Below is a small sampling of noteworthy studies published by VA researchers within the past month. This list is intended to reflect the broad spectrum of VA research, but is in no way inclusive of all VA researcher topics or projects. Visit the [VACO Library](#) website to sign up for alerts on published VA studies on many different topics.

[SARS-CoV-2 vaccine protection and deaths among US veterans during 2021](#). Cohn BA, Cirillo PM, Murphy CC, Krigbaum KY, Wallace AW. Vaccine protection against COVID-19 declined during 2021, but protection against death and infection remained high. *Science*. 2021 Nov 4. Online ahead of print.

[Fraction flow reserve-guided PCI as compared with coronary bypass surgery](#). Fearon WF, Zimmermann FM, De Bruyne B, Piroth Z, van Straten AH, Szekely L, Davidavicius G et al. In patients with three-vessel coronary artery disease, fraction flow reserve-guided percutaneous coronary intervention was not found to be non-inferior to coronary-artery bypass grafting. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 Nov 4. Online ahead of print.

[Chlorthalidone for hypertension in advanced chronic kidney disease](#). Agarwal R, Sinha AD, Cramer AE, Balmes-Fenwick M, Dickinson JH, Ouyang F, Tu W. Among patients with advanced chronic kidney disease and poorly

controlled hypertension, chlorthalidone therapy improved blood pressure control at 122 weeks as compared with placebo. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 Nov 5. Online ahead of print.

[Association of mental stress-induced myocardial ischemia with cardiovascular events in patients with coronary heart disease](#). Vaccarino V, Almuwaqqat Z, Kim JH, Hammadah M, Shah AJ, Ko YA, Elon L et al. Among patients with stable coronary heart disease, the presence of mental stress-induced ischemia was significantly associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular death or nonfatal myocardial infarction. *JAMA*. 2021 Nov 9;326(18):1818-1828.

[Angiotensin receptor-neprilysin inhibition in acute myocardial infarction](#). Pfeffer MA, Claggett B, Lewis EF, Granger CB, Kober L, Maggioni AP, Mann DL et al. Sacubitril-valsartan was not associated with a significantly lower incidence of death from cardiovascular causes or incident heart failure than ramipril among patients with acute myocardial infarction. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 Nov 11;385(20):1845-1855.

[Adjustable intragastric balloon for treatment of obesity: A multicentre, open-label, randomised clinical trial](#). Dayyeh BK, Maselli DB, Rapaka B, Lavin T, Noar M, Hussan H, Chapman CG et al. When an adjustable intragastric balloon was combined with lifestyle modification, significant weight loss was achieved and maintained for six months following removal. *Lancet*. 2021 Nov 27;398(10315):1965-1973.

[Safety and efficacy of avalglucosidase alfa versus alglucosidase alfa in patients with late-onset Pompe disease \(COMET\): a phase 3, randomised, multicentre trial](#). Diaz-Manera J, Kishnani PS, Kushlaf H, Ladha S, Mozaffar T, Straub V, Toscano A et al. The study provides evidence of clinically meaningful improvement with avalglucosidase alfa therapy over alglucosidase alfa in respiratory function, ambulation, and functional endurance, with no new safety signals reported. *Lancet Neurology*. 2021 Dec;20(12):1012-1026.

[New creatinine- and cystatin C-based equations to estimate GFR without race](#). Inker LA, Eneanya ND, Coresh J, Tighiouart H, Wang D, Sing Y, Crews DC et al. New eGFR equations that incorporate creatinine and cystatin C but omit race are more accurate and led to smaller differences between Black and non-Black participants than other equations. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 Nov 4;385(19):1737-1749.

[Epinephrine before defibrillation in patients with shockable in-hospital cardiac arrest: propensity matched analysis](#). Evans E, Swanson MB, Mohr N, Boulos N, Vaughan-Sarrazin M, Chan PS, Girotra S. Contrary to current guidelines that prioritize immediate defibrillation for in-hospital cardiac arrest due to a shockable rhythm, more than one in four patients are treated with epinephrine before defibrillation, which is associated with worse survival. *BMJ*. 2021 Nov 10;375:e066534.



Media Buzz

Social Media Highlights

On Nov. 14, the main VA Twitter account tweeted to its over 600,000 followers a [story](#) about a VA research study on preventing nerve cell deterioration after traumatic brain injury



Veterans Affairs 
@DeptVetAffairs



Researchers have discovered an approach that could prevent nerve cells in the brain from deteriorating after a traumatic brain injury (TBI).



blogs.va.gov

Researchers home in on biochemical link between brain injury, Alzheimer's dise...
VA researchers have discovered an approach that could prevent nerve cells in the brain from deteriorating after a traumatic brain injury.

8:30 AM · Nov 14, 2021 · Salesforce - Social Studio

If you would like to submit a post to go on the VA Research Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram pages, please do so via email at ORDMedia@va.gov.

Please include the following information:

- Desired platform: Facebook, Twitter (240 character max), or Instagram
- Post content
- Image
- Link

After the above are submitted, the request will be forwarded to the ORD Communications team for approval and scheduling. Posts may also be added to a library of potential stories to be picked up by other VA social media accounts, such as the main VA pages.

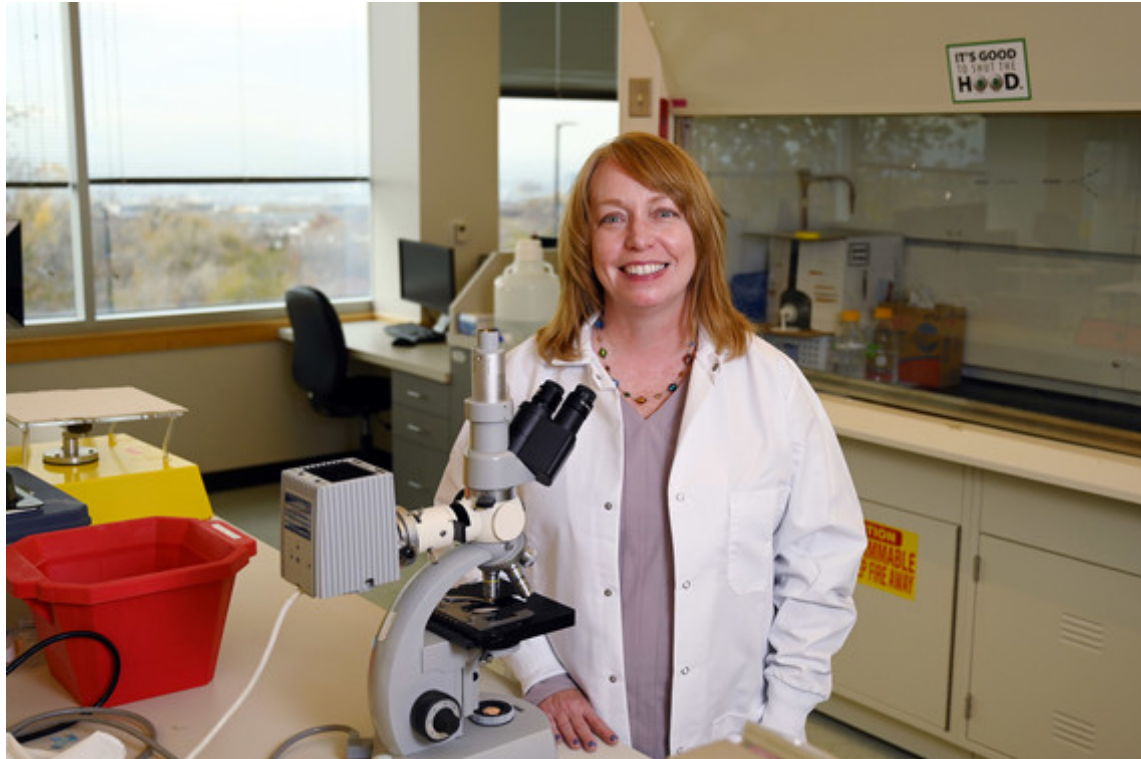
VA Research in the News

More evidence that pandemic delayed cancer diagnoses

A [story](#) in *U.S. News & World Report* on Dec. 6 discussed a study from VA Maryland Health Care System researchers that analyzed data from more than 9 million VA patients. The study found that procedures to diagnose cancer were used less often and there were fewer new cancer diagnoses in 2020 than in the two previous years. This change was likely caused by disruptions in non-emergency care due to the pandemic. New cancer diagnoses dropped between 13% and 23%, depending on type of cancer. In 2020, colonoscopies in VA decreased by 45%, prostate biopsies dropped 29%, cystoscopies for bladder cancer fell by 21%, and chest scans for lung cancer fell by 10%. The researchers hope that the results will help physicians and health care organizations plan and allocate resources to re-engage with patients.

This study was covered by several other news outlets, including *ABC News*, *PhillyVoice*, and the *Washingtonian*.

Research Photo of the Month



Dr. Candace Floyd, a specialist in TBI and spinal cord injury research at the Salt Lake City VA, is the lead investigator for the [Interagency Resource Coordinating Center for Preclinical TBI Research](#). (Photo by Jeff Grandon)

Do you have photos of VA researchers in action or interesting science images from your lab? Share them with us! Send your photos to *ORD Field Update* editor Tristan Horrom at tristan.horrom@va.gov.



Upcoming Events

- A [webinar](#) on the ORD Research Supplements to Promote Diversity will be held on **Dec. 16, 2021**, at 2:30 pm EST through Webex.
- The next ORD Monthly Field Call will be held on **Dec. 20, 2021**, at 1:30 pm EST on Microsoft Teams.



Achievements and Milestones

We are looking for VA researchers who served in the military to feature in a series called [VA Researchers Who Served](#). The profiles explain the critical work that VA researchers do for the Veteran community and at the same time highlight and recognize their military service.

If you know a VA researcher who would be a good candidate for this series, please contact Mike Richman (Michael.richman1@va.gov).

History Corner



A leading prosthetic engineer—Dr. Dudley Childress (1934–2014) had humble roots in small-town Missouri and went on to become one of the world’s leading prosthetics engineers. It was on his grandparents’ farm that he first took an interest in machinery. He studied electrical engineering at the University of Missouri, where he was also a star quarterback. After a stint in the Army Reserve, Childress joined VA and Northwestern University and helped pioneer myoelectric control, which applies electrical signals from muscles to prosthetic limbs. His lab later developed the “sip and puff” wheelchair and many other technologies. He received VA’s Magnuson Award in 2002 for his achievements on behalf of people with disabilities.

Anyone interested in receiving general news updates about VA research is invited to [sign up](#) for our VA Research Currents and VA Research Spotlight monthly emails.



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