



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

Message from the CRADO

Dear VA Research colleagues,

Last month I talked about my goal of working with all of you to transform VA Research into a unified enterprise, which will result in all of us being a part of a formidable biomedical research system! Lofty goals are just that without the practical tools and processes to make them real, so today, I'd like to tell you more about the VA Innovation and Research Review System (VAIRRS), a core piece of infrastructure that will help us to join forces as an enterprise.

VAIRRS is a software management system, based on the IRBNet platform, which we have been rolling out across the entire system to streamline and standardize our research oversight and approval processes. By switching to VAIRRS, it will be easier to work together because we'll be using the same system and processes for the institutional review board (IRB), in addition to things like animal-study approvals and research and development committee operations.

Before we instituted VAIRRS, the majority of local IRBs had their own forms and procedures, meaning researchers would have to be familiar with different paperwork and processes at different sites. This makes it more challenging to work across sites within the enterprise.

VAIRRS makes it simple to designate and rely on a single IRB for multi-site trials because every site will be using the same system. And single-site trials will be streamlined as well. With VAIRRS, it will always be the same process regardless of facility. Part of the beauty of VA is that people who have moved to different cities and academic affiliates can remain part of the VA family. Previously, these moves would require learning new research systems and processes. With VAIRRS, a researcher won't have that learning curve.

So far, 98 research sites—as well as the Central IRB—are live in VAIRRS. We expect the remaining sites to be onboarded by June 30. The system has 23,000 registered users so far, which gives you a sense of the scale of the nationwide community you belong to! It is my hope that the VAIRRS technology lowers barriers to cross-site collaborations: we can do amazing things when we work together.

Of course, to realize the potential of VAIRRS, we must all learn to use it. Because it will serve as the system for Research & Development Committee approvals, all researchers and research offices will need to be familiar with how it works. Many of you already may have participated in training on VAIRRS. Training information is available through the SharePoint portal. There is also an FAQ available on the Office of Research Protections, Policy & Education (ORPP&E) website. Special thanks to the ORPP&E staff for spearheading this transition, and to those of you in the field who were early adopters of the new system.

I want to thank all of you for your cooperation with this process. Coming together as an enterprise, around VAIRRS and other innovative resources, will surely advance our goals of serving Veterans through research.

Rachel

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD
Chief Research and Development Officer (14RD)



Department of Veterans Affairs



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Policy/Admin Updates

Early notification of COVID-19 publication submissions no longer required—As of Monday, June 14, 2021, VA researchers are no longer required to inform leadership about COVID-19 related publications at the point when they are *submitted* to a journal for peer review or submitted to a preprint website. ORD has determined it can now rely on the regular [publication notification process](#) for any COVID-19 related items. (See the [June 10 email from Dr. Rachel Ramoni](#) to research offices with the subject line: “Recission as of 6-14-21 of ad hoc COVID-19 publication notification policy.”)

COVID-19 publications can now be treated like other researcher publications. Should you or any of your investigators believe that a particular publication may be of special interest and may warrant earlier-than-usual notification to ORD, whether on COVID or any other topic, refer to the contact information on our [Publication Notification](#) webpage and send an email. This is not required, but such early notifications, sent at your or your investigators’ discretion, continue to be valuable.



Resources and Opportunities

Data Monitoring Committee members needed—CSR&D's Centralized Data Monitoring Committee is seeking members for two panels: Medical/Surgical (M/S) and Psychiatric, Behavioral Health and Neurologic

Disorders (PBN). Qualifications for membership include funding history and clinical trial experience, academic position of associate professor or above, a solid publications record, and review experience. Immediate needs are for cardiologists and biostatisticians. Pulmonologists, oncologists, urologists, and neurologists also are needed. For more information, please contact Dr. Tamara Paine (Tamara.Paine@va.gov).

Million Veteran Program (MVP) Women's Campaign—This year, MVP launched its first targeted outreach campaign to enroll 5,000 women Veterans between March and September 2021. To date, nearly 1,500 women Veterans have signed up at mvp.va.gov.

MVP is seeking your help to inform Veterans about an exciting opportunity to volunteer for research to help the VA accomplish this goal. Any Veteran that can provide informed consent is invited to join.

ACOS/AOs please consider printing and hanging MVP flyers around your facility and forwarding to your Investigators.

Approved flyers, one-pagers, and text to include in patient instructions are available for download on [MVP's campaign toolkit](#). For questions or more information, contact Jennifer Deen at Jennifer.Deen@va.gov or Claudia Gutierrez at Claudia.Gutierrez@va.gov.



VA SHIELD accepting applications for coordinating center—The VA Science and Health Initiative to Combat Infectious and Emerging Life-Threatening Diseases (VA SHIELD) is expanding its activities and is seeking applications for a Coordinating Center.

VA SHIELD has been established as a centralized emerging diseases biospecimen bank and data repository. VA SHIELD was designed with two main goals: to create a comprehensive repository of specimens and associated data available to advance scientific understanding of infectious diseases and by sharing specimens and associated data develop diagnostic, therapeutic and preventative strategies for immediate use in clinical environments.

The Coordinating Center, funded through ORD, will be responsible for facilitating ORD's enterprise strategy for research on COVID-19, as well as other infectious and emerging life-threatening diseases.

More information can be found at [VA SHIELD \(Central Biospecimen and Data Repository\)](#). A request for applications with the center requirements has been emailed to facility associate chiefs of staff for research. Interested centers should submit applications to VASHIELD@va.gov by July 31, 2021.

Employment

- (05/27/21) [Research Coordinator](#)- Boston, MA
- (05/25/21) [Data Analyst](#)- Boston, MA
- (05/25/21) [Health Science Officer Suicide Prevention/Mental Health](#)- Location Negotiable After Selection, United States

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 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.

[Four-month rifapentine regimens with or without moxifloxacin for tuberculosis](#). Dorman SE, Nahid P, Kurbatove E, Phillips PP, Bryant K, Dooley KE, Engle M, et al. The efficacy of a 4-month rifapentine-based regimen containing moxifloxacin was noninferior to the standard 6-month regimen in the treatment of tuberculosis. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 May 6;384(18):1705-1718.

Association of metabolic-bariatric surgery with long-term survival in adults with and without diabetes: A one-stage meta-analysis of matched cohort and prospective controlled studies with 174 772 participants. Syn NL, Cummings DE, Wang LZ, Lin DJ, Zhao JJ, Loh M, Koh ZJ, et al. Among adults with obesity, metabolic-bariatric surgery is associated with substantially lower all-cause mortality rates and longer life expectancy than usual obesity management. *Lancet*. 2021 May 15;397(10287):1830-1841.

[High-performance brain-to-text communication via handwriting](#). Willett FR, Avansino DT, Hochberg LR, Henderson JM, Shenoy KV. Researchers developed an intracortical brain-computer interface that decodes attempted handwriting movements from neural activity in the motor cortex and translates it to text in real time. A paralyzed participant was able to achieve typing speeds of 90 characters per minute with 94% accuracy using the device. *Nature*. 2021 May;593(7858):249-254.

[Association of coronary artery bypass grafting vs percutaneous coronary intervention with memory decline in older adults undergoing coronary revascularization](#). Witlock EL, Diaz-Ramirez LG, Smith AK, Boscardin WJ, Covinsky KE, Avidan MS, Glymour MM. Among older adults undergoing coronary revascularization, the type of revascularization procedure was not significantly associated with differences in the change of rate of memory decline. *JAMA*. 2021 May 18;325(19):1955-1964.

[Genome-wide association study of more than 40,000 bipolar disorder cases provides new insights into the underlying biology](#). Mullins N, Forstner AJ, O'Connell KS, Coombs B, Coleman JR, Qiao Z, Als TD, et al. The results advance the understanding of the biology of bipolar disorder, identify novel therapeutic leads, and prioritize genes for functional follow-up studies. *Nature Genetics*. 2021 May 17. Online ahead of print.

[Ultrasound renal denervation for hypertension resistant to triple medication pill \(RADIANCE-HTN TRIO\): A randomised, multicentre, single-blind, sham-controlled trial](#). Azizi M, Sanghvi K, Saxena M, Gosse P, Reilly JP, Levy T, Rump LC, et al. Compared with sham procedure, ultrasound renal denervation reduced blood pressure at two months in patients with hypertension resistant to a standardized triple combination pill. *Lancet*. 2021 May 14. Online ahead of print.

[Final report of a trial of intensive versus standard blood-pressure control](#). SPRINT Research Group; Lewis CE, Fine LJ, Beddhu S, Cheung AK, Cushman WC, Cutler JA, Evans GW, et al. Among patients who were at increased cardiovascular risk, targeting a systolic blood pressure of less than 120 mm Hg resulted in lower rates of major adverse cardiovascular events and lower all-cause mortality than targeting a systolic blood pressure of less than 140 mm Hg, both during receipt of the randomly assigned therapy and after the trial. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 May 20;384(20):1921-1930.

[Behavioral interventions to improve population health outreach for hepatitis C screening: Randomized clinical trial](#). Mehta SJ, Day SC, Norris AH, Sung J, Reitz C, Wollack C, Snider CK, et al. Opt-out framing and effort reduction by including a signed laboratory order with outreach increased screening for hepatitis C. *BMJ*. 2021 May 18;373:n1022.

[A brain-computer interface that evokes tactile sensations improves robotic arm control](#). Flesher SN, Downey JE, Weiss JM, Hughes CL, Herrera AJ, Tyler-Kabara EC, Boninger ML, Collinger JL, Gaunt RA. Supplementing vision with tactile sensation

using a bidirectional brain-computer interface enabled a person with tetraplegia to substantially improve performance with a robotic limb. *Science*. 2021 May 21;372(6544):831-836.

[Bi-ancestral depression GWAS in the Million Veteran Program and meta-analysis in >1.2 million individuals highlight new therapeutic directions](#). Levey DF, Stein MB, Wendt FR, Pathak GA, Zhou H, Aslan M, Quaden R, et al. A large genome-wide association study identified 178 genomic risk loci for major depressive disorder. *Nature Neuroscience*. 2021 May 27. Online ahead of print.



Media Buzz

On June 2, the main VA Twitter account tweeted to its over 600,000 followers MVP research aimed at predicting breast cancer risk.



VA's [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts shared a video of the top five Vantage Point stories of the week, which highlighted a large MVP study on the genetic basis of depression

VA Research in the News

[“Why vaccine side effects really happen, and when you should worry”](#) from *National Geographic* discusses what causes reactions to vaccines. A [study](#) from the Minneapolis VA and the Mayo Clinic in 1990 found that people given the flu shot or a placebo reported similar side effects, including headaches and fever. According to the researchers, the study showed that it's easy to confuse an allergic reaction with fear and nervousness. Recent studies show that many of people's reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine may be caused by their own fears rather than a reaction to the shot. The story explains that about 7-10% of people receiving the second Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine do experience some type of reaction, such as flu-like symptoms, according to recent research. But the story stresses the difference between temporary side effects caused by the immune response and serious adverse effects, which are extremely rare. The story

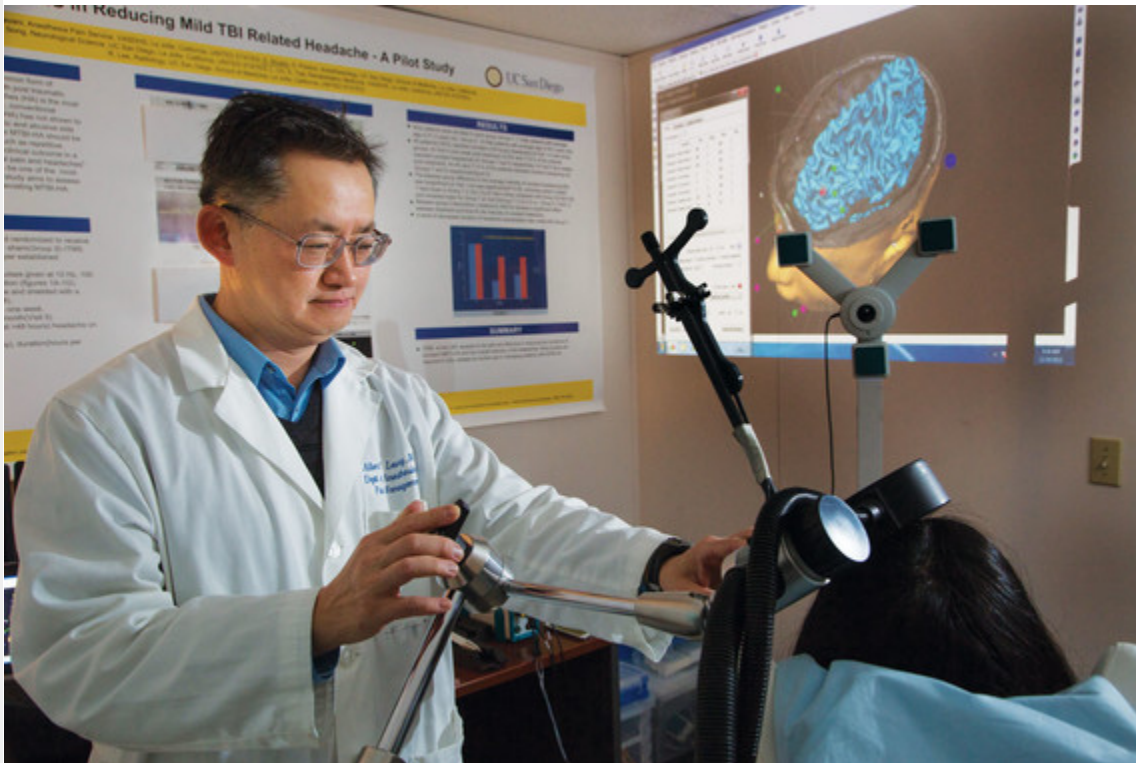
explains that women are more likely than men to experience temporary side effects from the vaccines, most likely caused by differences in the immune system based on sex.

Research Week Photos from the Field

As part of Research Week, we collected photos highlighting VA research in action from across the country. Visit the [Research Week event website](#) to view these engaging photos from the field.

And in case you missed it, check out our Research Week video [here](#).

Research Photo of the Month



Dr. Albert Leung of the VA San Diego Healthcare System is testing whether transcranial magnetic stimulation can ease headaches associated with head trauma. [Learn more](#) (Photo by Kevin Walsh)

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.

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

Please include the following information:

- Desired platform, Facebook, Twitter (240character 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.



Upcoming Events

Independence Day will be observed Monday, July 5th.

The next **ORD Monthly Field Call** will be held on June 21, 2021, at 1:30 EST on Microsoft Teams.



Achievements and Milestones

History Corner



Kidney transplant pioneer—Often called the “father of human transplantation,” Dr. Thomas E. Starzl served nearly 50 years as a VA surgeon and researcher. A World War II Navy Veteran, he began his VA career in Chicago and then moved to Denver, where in 1962 he performed the first successful kidney transplant. Eventually, he would pioneer methods for both kidney and liver transplant that are still in use today. Starzl, who retired from the Pittsburgh VA in the late 1990s, won a prestigious Lasker Award—the seventh for a VA researcher—in 2012.

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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