



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

## Message from the CRADO

Dear VA research colleagues,

Welcome to the first issue of *ORD Field Update*. This new monthly e-newsletter is intended to complement our existing communications with the field, such as the monthly field call. I hope we can bring you useful information each month to help you excel in your role within the VA research community.

One of my main goals as CRADO is to transform VA Research into an enterprise—a streamlined, collaborative organization that effectively supports Veterans through research. The idea behind the VA research enterprise is to enable all VA research facilities and programs to function together as an integrated entity with shared goals.

In my visits to medical centers, I never got used to the phrase, “If you’ve seen one VA medical center, you’ve seen one VA medical center.” Historically, each medical center may have had its own way of doing things, and at the same time, each research program had to face challenges alone. By coming together with shared goals and processes, we become far more efficient and effective, and far more powerful in what we can accomplish on behalf of Veterans through research.

I became convinced that building a research enterprise is the most important thing that I can do in ORD through several experiences. The first was Access to Clinical Trials (ACT) for Veterans, a program aimed at decreasing the amount of time it takes to start up a multisite, industry-sponsored trial. Among other things, ACT led to the ability to rely upon commercial IRBs, which proved essential in our response to COVID. Another was the listening tours ORD conducted, where we went to about 30 VAMCs and heard about the specific challenges being faced at those sites. One thing gleaned from the listening tours was a need to more effectively engage some of the smaller VAMCs in research. More recently, our response to COVID-19 and the need to rapidly mobilize our research resources nationwide further emphasized for me the benefits of the enterprise approach.

Some steps already taken to improve the enterprise are discussed in more detail below. The DocuSign portal will help research studies more easily attain digital informed consent from participants. The CIPHER phenomics library and VA SHIELD biorepository will facilitate data-sharing and give more researchers access to health records and samples. And the COVID-19 volunteer registry can connect investigators conducting COVID-19 research with a large body of volunteers ready to participate in research.

We have already made so much progress as a community, and I thank each and every one of you for your efforts. How do we continue on the path to being an exemplary enterprise?

Over the coming months, I will use this space in the *ORD Field Update* to discuss some of the specific initiatives we are pursuing toward that goal. Your ideas and feedback are always welcome. Together, we will transform VA Research into an effective enterprise, unified in our mission to improve the lives of Veterans through research.



By the way, as you may know, the motto for National VA Research Week this year is “One Team, One Mission.” If you haven’t already done so, please make sure to register for our virtual events; see below under “Upcoming Events” for more information.

Rachel

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**[Policy/Admin Updates](#)**

**DocuSign request portal**—ORD has opened the DocuSign Research Use Request SharePoint portal.

ORD has purchased a supply of envelopes to be used in research studies requiring documentation of informed consent and/or HIPAA authorization. All requests are considered, but studies requiring the creation of <100 envelopes (100 subjects) will need to provide justification for use due to the support required by the OI&T Identity and Access management team. Inpatient studies are generally not appropriate for DocuSign. Study teams should consider the use of [iMedConsent](#) for inpatient studies or studies where all study subjects will present to a facility with CPRS access.

For studies funded by sponsors outside of VA, please make sure that the sponsor will not require the use of their electronic signature platform prior to requesting DocuSign use. Reimbursement to ORD may be required for studies funded by non-VA sponsors (process under exploration).

Requests for the use of DocuSign are usually reviewed and decided within two to three business days if all appropriate information is provided.

To request the use of DocuSign, complete [the form](#) on the ORD SharePoint site.

**VA ORD Research Supplements to Promote Diversity**—ORD has announced an opportunity for VA medical facilities to request supplementary funds to promote diversity in their workforce. These funds would be in support of a mentored research experience for qualified clinician and non-clinician scientists in the postdoctoral phase of their career. ORD is seeking to increase the applicant pool to include candidates from underrepresented groups.

The supplement will be awarded to a principal investigator who has an active VA merit award with at least two years remaining on the award at the time the supplement is funded. Applications must be submitted via email to [VHACCOORDDEIWG@va.gov](mailto:VHACCOORDDEIWG@va.gov) and are due June 1, with decisions released by July 1.

More information is available in the [Funding section](#) of the ORD webpage.



## Resources and Opportunities

**VA Phenomics Library**—The VA Phenomics Library-Centralized Interactive Phenomics Resource (CIPHER) is a catalog and knowledge-sharing platform of phenomic metadata aimed at optimizing Veterans' health data, driving collaborative research, and improving clinical operations. Learn more about [CIPHER here](#).

**Volunteer registry as a research resource**—The VA [Coronavirus Research Volunteer List](#), aka the "Registry," is soliciting interest from VA investigators who would like to use the Registry for COVID-19-related research. The Registry has over 58,000 volunteers, with 23% being non-white and 18% being women. Investigators interested in using the Registry can find more information on SharePoint [here](#) and submit a request that will be reviewed by the Registry Management team.

**New biorepository**—The VA Science and Health Initiative to Combat Infectious and Life-Threatening Diseases ([VA SHIELD](#)) is a comprehensive, secure biorepository of specimens and associated data related to COVID-19 and other emerging diseases. The specimens and data are available to authorized VA investigators—and, under certain circumstances, to their external collaborators—to advance scientific understanding in support of developing diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventative strategies for use in clinical care.

VA medical center clinical personnel and investigators who have unused clinical or research specimens that are no longer needed for research or in the clinic/pathology laboratory can [contact VA SHIELD](#) to donate the specimens.

## Employment

Below are a few of the most recent employment opportunities in VA Research. Visit the [employment page](#) on the VA Research website for more listings.

- (04/29/21) [Statistical Programmer](#)- Hines, IL
- (04/28/21) [Physician - Associate Chief of Staff - Quality](#)- Chicago, IL
- (04/28/21) [Biostatistician](#)- Hines, IL

- (04/27/21) [Chief Financial Officer \(CFO\) of the Southern California Institute for Research and Education \(SCIRE\)- Long Beach, CA](#)



## 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.

[High-dimensional characterization of post-acute sequelae of COVID-19](#). Al-Aly Z, Xie Y, Bowe B. A large VA study shows that people who have had COVID-19 are at heightened risk of both death and many health problems six months after recovering from the virus. *Nature*. 2021 Apr 22.

[Sex-related disparities in cardiovascular health care among patients with premature atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease](#). Lee MT, Mahtta D, Ramsey DJ, Liu J, Misra A, Nasir K, Samad Z, Itchhaporia D, Khan SU, Schofield RS, Ballantyne CM, Petersen LA, Virani SS. Women Veterans with premature atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease receive less optimal secondary prevention care in comparison with men. *JAMA Cardiology*. 2021 Apr 21. Online ahead of print.

[Impaired executive function exacerbates neural markers of posttraumatic stress disorder](#). Jagger-Rickels A, Stumps A, Rothlein D, Park H, Fortenbaugh F, Zuberer A, Fonda JR, Fortier CB, DeGutis J, Milberg W, McGlinchey R, Esterman M. Poor executive functioning, alongside limbic network and frontal-parietal control network dysregulation, may represent a neurocognitive subtype of PTSD. *Psychological Medicine*. 2021 Apr 21;1-14.

[Efficacy of metformin monotherapy in US Veterans with type 2 diabetes and preexisting chronic kidney disease stage 3](#). Gosmanov AR, Gemoets DE, Kaminsky LS, Kovesdy CP, Gosmanova EO. Individuals with chronic kidney disease and Type 2 diabetes were at increased risk of metformin monotherapy failure. However, metformin is still a valuable treatment option for patients with both conditions. *Diabetes, Obesity, and Metabolism*. 2021 Apr 28. Online ahead of print.

[Why test results are still getting “lost” to follow-up: A qualitative study of implementation gaps](#). Zimolzak AJ, Shahid U, Giardina TD, Memon SA, Mushtaq U, Zubkoff L, Murphy DR, Bradford A, Singh H. Perceived barriers and recommendations for improving test result follow-up often reflected previously known problems and their corresponding solutions, which have not been consistently implemented in practice. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. 2021 Apr 27. Online ahead of print.

[Gender differences in the relationship between workplace civility and burnout among VA primary care providers](#). Apaydin EA, Rose DE, Yano EM, Shekelle PG, Stockdale SE, Mohr DC. Female primary care providers report lower workplace civility than male primary care providers. An inverse relationship between civility and burnout is present for women but not men. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. 2021 Apr 26. Online ahead of print.



## Media Buzz

### Social Media Highlights

On May 1, the main VA Twitter account tweeted to its over 600,000 followers about a VA study on using genetics to find ways to repurpose existing drugs to fight COVID-19



**Veterans Affairs** ✓ @DeptVetAffairs · May 1



The goal is to identify existing drugs, either FDA-approved or in clinical development for other conditions, that can be repurposed for the early management of COVID-19. Doing so, they say, will help keep people with the virus from being hospitalized.



Using genetics, researchers identify potential drugs for early treatment...  
A new study using genetics suggests researchers should prioritize clinical trials of existing drugs that target two proteins to manage early...  
[blogs.va.gov](https://blogs.va.gov)



Another VA tweet about research that garnered significant interest was this tweet on April 24 about how an early lung cancer screening program saves lives



**Veterans Affairs** ✓ @DeptVetAffairs · Apr 14

Early screening for lung cancer saves lives [bit.ly/2OSNKF8](https://bit.ly/2OSNKF8) via #VAntagePoint



Early screening for lung cancer saves lives - VAntage Point

Vietnam Veteran found out he had lung cancer when he took part in a nationwide VA program to boost the number of Veterans screened for ...

[blogs.va.gov](https://blogs.va.gov)



## VA Research in the News

### The VA Is Testing an Implant That Could Allow Paralyzed Veterans to Walk Again

[Military.com](https://www.military.com) reported on a new study at the Richmond VA Medical Center that has potential to help paralyzed Veterans walk again:

*Photo by Joshua Burch*



Five years ago, Marine Lance Cpl. Joshua Burch became the first paralyzed service member to walk to his own promotion ceremony, wearing an exoskeleton that helped him walk and stand to receive his corporal chevrons. Now medically retired, Burch, 26, hopes again to be a trailblazer—the first VA patient to regain function in his lower body courtesy of an electrical implant in his spine designed to stimulate his body's sensorimotor networks. "Even thinking about walking is crazy. I look at this as a stepping-stone to a future where others like me can walk. I look at my participation in this research as a way of helping people out," Burch said during an interview in March with [Military.com](https://www.military.com). Researchers at the Richmond VA have launched a study to determine whether epidural stimulators can help paralyzed veterans recover motor activity, as well as control over their "inner systems," such as cardiovascular and bladder functions.

## Research Photo of the Month





Health science specialist Yasamin Azadzi removes Million Veteran Program samples from a cryotank at the Boston MVP facility. Photo by Frank Curran.

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



## Upcoming Events

**National VA Research Week** will take place **May 17–21, 2021**. Research Week is a time to mark the achievements and innovations of the VA research enterprise and community and to acknowledge the valued partnerships that help us achieve our mission on behalf of Veterans. Our 2021 Research Week theme is **VA Research: One Team, One Mission**.

A Virtual Research Week Awards Ceremony will be held at 3 p.m. (ET) on May 19, 2021, featuring video segments on awardees, Veteran volunteers, and more. Register for the event on the [VA Research website](#).

A separate “symposium” event featuring more detailed presentations by our awardees is planned for May 21, 2021. [Registration](#) is available now.

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The next ORD Monthly Field Call will be held on May 17, 2021, at 1:30 EST on Microsoft Teams.



## Achievements and Milestones

### Awards

**Best paper in epidemiology**—Dr. Ryan Ferguson of the Boston Cooperative Studies Program Coordinating Center was recognized for the 2020 Article of the Year by the *American Journal of Epidemiology* for his article "[Evaluating the utility of coarsened exact matching for pharmacoepidemiology using real and simulated claims data.](#)"

### History Corner



**Cardiac pacemaker pioneer**—Dr. William Chardack, a Korean War Veteran who served as chief of surgery at the Buffalo VA Medical Center, was part of the research team that developed the first successful implantable cardiac pacemaker. It was first used in patients in 1960. He collaborated with VA colleague Dr. Andrew Gage and engineer Wilson Greatbatch. Chardack had served in Korea as chief surgeon of the 1<sup>st</sup> MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital). He won a Bronze Star—and a Croix de Guerre from France—for a battlefield-developed transfusion pump made from the base of an artillery shell

### In Memoriam

The Office of Research and Development is deeply saddened by the passing on April 20, 2021, of Dr. Dawn Tranchino Provenzale. Dr. Provenzale was the director of the Cooperative Studies Program Epidemiology Center at the Durham VA Medical Center, as well as a professor of medicine in gastroenterology at the Duke University School of Medicine. A highly respected scholar, physician, and mentor, Dr. Provenzale was a trailblazer in clinical research in gastroenterology and guided the careers of a generation of researchers. She was one of the early pioneers in the field of outcomes research in gastroenterology in the Durham VA's Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) program. Through her research, Dr. Provenzale made important contributions to our understanding of colorectal cancer screening and surveillance, Barrett's esophagus surveillance and the risk of esophageal cancer, and inflammatory bowel disease.

The VA research community suffered a great loss in the passing of Dr. Pierre Massion on April 4, 2021. An internationally known expert on early detection and prevention of lung cancer, Dr. Massion was a researcher and member of the Pulmonary Consult Service at the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, as well as the director of the Cancer Early Detection and Prevention Initiative and co-leader of the Cancer Health Outcomes and Control Research Program at the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center. In his prestigious career, Dr. Massion made multiple discoveries related to cancer biomarkers, and was also instrumental in starting the first lung cancer screening program in VA. He also served as a mentor for many early-career physicians.

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