



## 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

Since we last talked, CSRD has made some challenging decisions on applications which were reviewed in the Fall 2020 round of review. In fact, it was the most challenging round I can even recall with respect to available funding to support new projects. Multiple factors are in play including: building our program of clinical studies has taken up more funding to allow higher budget limits, some large-scale clinical trials with high budgets due to multiple sites engaged, contributing to the COVID19 research effort, and some small measure of pandemic related impacts. As the organization turns to supporting enterprise-wide infrastructure builds, we will have to all track on what that means to our service level funding. This round also presented many highly meritorious applications which we did not select for funding, as our final decisions were also driven by the match to our highest priorities. Investigators should discuss their questions with their portfolio manager here to make sure there is common understanding about how decisions came to be made and how best to support our priorities. We will keep in touch if anything changes with our budget, and definitely hope for better outcomes next round. Please take care,

*Terri*

## Management Strategy for COVID-related Impacts

Everyone is well aware that we are still in a place where we do not know the full impact of COVID-related research impacts and associated costs. Recently we have been conducting individual calls with our Career Development awardees, and I am so proud to hear of their

progress despite the circumstances they find themselves in as they start their research careers. We have discussed mitigation strategies in these calls and will be disseminating some of these common approaches in the future. For now, we continue to ask you to keep us informed about progress as projects restart and come off, as well as challenges you are facing. This includes delays in starting new projects, e.g., those approved in our Spring 2020 round, because the delays also have longer term impacts we need to track.

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## Webpage for COVID-19 Research

<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vacovhacomm/admin/projects/covid19>

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## VA-TEAM Webinar is Monday

A VA Translational Education and Mentoring Center (VA-TEAM) Informational Webinar is set for Monday afternoon at 4 p.m. ET. The webinar will cover the basics of the VA-TEAM program and have a Q and A period.

**Registration:** [https://cwru.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_koh77IZoQSSlz2xNOWPc2Q](https://cwru.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_koh77IZoQSSlz2xNOWPc2Q)

**VA-TEAM Website:** <http://www.va-team.org>

**RFA:** <https://fescenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/VA-TEAM-RFA-2021-1.1.pdf>

**Application:** <https://fescenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/VA-TEAM-PY2021-Application-1.1.pdf>

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## VA/NIA RFA Webinar Slated for February 8

ORD and the National Institute on Aging will host a webinar to present the unique VA/NIA RFA - Mentored Physician-Scientist Award in Alzheimer's Disease (AD) and AD Related Dementias funding opportunity on Tuesday, February 8, from 1 to 2 p.m. ET.

Purpose of the webinar is to present information and answer questions about this unique RFA for early career VA physician-scientists with an interest in Alzheimer's Disease and AD Related Dementias (ADRD) to gain mentored research time as well as experience collaborating with an NIA funded scientist. This RFA includes all the characteristics of a VA Career Development Award and includes an NIA supplement \$185,000 per year to support research costs for the trainee as supplemental funding to the NIA mentor's parent grant (RO1, PO1).

The target audience is VA early career VA physician-scientists (MD and DO), mentors with interests in ADRD (VA and NIA) and research office personnel.

Lead presenters will be Mark Roltsch, P.D., Scientific Portfolio Manager, VA, and Lisa Opanashuk, Ph.D., Program Director, NIA.

Webinar details may be found at

<https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m162a091e190e9b5e55f1ee5b0587fd9a>

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## Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research and Development, Research Supplements to Support Diversity Announced



- Supplement to **funded VA Merit Awards. Eligible PIs with VA Merits with at least 2 years remaining may apply.**
- Supports mentored research experiences for early career scientists from underrepresented populations\*
- Individuals from racial and ethnic groups that have been shown by NSF to be underrepresented in health-related sciences on a national basis
- Individuals with disabilities
- U.S. Veterans

\*The above criteria are intended to increase the applicant pool but will not be used as a determinative factor in selecting participants in this program.

- **Budget:** \$85,000/yr for mentee salary, \$12,000/yr for supplies and \$3,000/yr to attend scientific meetings.
- **Duration:** Up to 2 years
- **Due:** June 1, 2021
- **For more information or to receive a copy of the announcement, email [Carol.Fowler@va.gov](mailto:Carol.Fowler@va.gov).**

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## Community of Science Meeting Held

The second CSRD COVID Community of Science meeting was held on January 7, 2021. It was attended by approximately 90 PIs and ORD staff.

Presentations focused on the following resources available to Principal Investigators engaged in COVID-related research: VA SHIELD: A VA Science and Health Initiative to Combat Infectious and Emerging Life-Threatening Diseases; MVP COVID updates; Epidemiology, Immunology and Clinical Characteristics of COVID-19 (EPIC<sup>3</sup>); and COVID modeling approaches to improve clinical decisions and care

In addition, the action plan from the December 2020 Cleveland Field Based Meeting entitled “VA COVID-19 Research: The current path and optimizing the way forward” was presented and updates were provided on the VA CURES platform.

Two Breakout Sessions focused on the topics of “Risk Factors and Associated Outcomes” and “Immunology, Vaccines and/or Therapeutics.”

The slide deck from the meeting is available on the ORD COVID SharePoint site at <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vacovhacomm/admin/projects/covid19/SitePages/ORD-Communications.aspx>.

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## Volunteer Registry Available for COVID-19 related research

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 56,000 volunteers nationwide with 23% being non-white and 18% being women. Investigators interested in using the Registry can find more information on SharePoint ([VA Coronavirus Research Volunteer List: Study Interest Form \(sharepoint.com\)](#)) and submit a request that will be reviewed by the Registry Management team.

The Registry collects general information from volunteers, such as demographics, contact information, a limited list of pre-existing conditions, daily interactions and living arrangements, COVID-19 status, and employment characteristics known to be relevant to COVID-19 risk and outcomes. Over 20 VA facilities have already successfully used the Registry to identify volunteers interested in joining COVID-19 vaccine trials resulting in the enrollment of over 350 individuals.

If you have any questions about the Registry, please email [ORDCOVID19@va.gov](mailto:ORDCOVID19@va.gov) with the subject: COVID-19 Research Registry

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## MVP Article Receives Top Billing by AJM

Million Veteran Program investigators Joel Gelernter, Murray Stein and Daniel Levey have shared with MVP leadership colleagues that their anxiety paper from last year received top billing from the editors at The American Journal of Psychiatry (Impact Factor 14.119) in their review of 2020’s “Articles of Import and Impact.” The article may be accessed at the following link:

[2020 Articles of Import and Impact | American Journal of Psychiatry \(psychiatryonline.org\)](#)

The investigators expressed thanks for the support in making this impactful research possible. They, as a group, expect to deliver many more great papers this year and to continue to share

the unique value the MVP represents to the scientific community worldwide and to our Veterans.

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## DMC Members Needed

Members are needed for CSRD's Centralized Data Monitoring Committee. The DMC currently has two panels – Medical/Surgical and Psychiatric, Behavioral Health and Neurologic Disorders. Qualifications for membership include funding history, academic position of associate professor or above, a solid publications record and review experience. For more information, please contact Lucindia Shouse ([Lucindia.Shouse@va.gov](mailto:Lucindia.Shouse@va.gov)).

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## Staff Highlights

### Mark Roltsch

Congratulations to Scientific Portfolio Manager Mark Roltsch, Ph.D., who was a co-recipient of the Employee Recognition Ace of Innovation Award announced at the January ORD All-Staff meeting. He and Cendrine Robinson, Ph.D., SPM from Rehabilitation Research and Development Service, received the award for their creative and highly effective co-leadership of the newly established ORD Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) group. This is a major and far-reaching activity by ORD to ensure VA research and researchers as well as the ORD workforce reflect the rich diversity of the Veterans we serve.

Mark and Cendrine energetically embraced the new initiative and expertly steered the widespread enthusiastic response from ORD staff to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive ORD enterprise. They created a comprehensive mission statement to effectively organize the large number of ORD volunteers into several highly effective working groups to focus on the multi-part DEI mission. Cendrine and Mark cleverly expanded the national impact of the DEI group's work by maximizing recently increased interest in DEI among and harmonization with the activities of ORD stakeholders/partners, including the National Research Advisory Committee, the Field Research Advisory Committee, and the National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations.

Mark and Cendrine are exploring plans to develop researchers interested in the needs of Veterans as early as middle school. They are leading the rapid development of a program for supplementary awards to recruit early career investigators into VA research (see announcement above). Cendrine and Mark are also fostering a mentorship and training program for early career investigators from underrepresented groups who have been previously unsuccessful in obtaining VA funding. Under Mark and Cendrine's innovative leadership, ORD's DEI group is developing new programs that are transforming traditional models for ORD activities and showing great promise to rapidly achieve the critically important mission of the DEI group across the ORD enterprise, including for the Veterans we serve.

Employee Recognition Awards are sponsored by the Employee Engagement Tiger Team and presented quarterly in three categories – Ace of Innovation, Cloud Nine Collaborator and Good Neighbor.

## **Eric Schwinder**

Health Science Specialist Eric Schwinder was activated by the Rhode Island National Guard on January 17 to support "Task Force Vaccine." This joint (Army National Guard and Air National Guard) team began vaccinating National Guard members against COVID-19 in December. Earlier this month, the Task Force began vaccinating members of the public, including civilian healthcare workers and other prioritized groups, under the direction of the Rhode Island Department of Health. Eric's primary responsibilities are in the Tactical Operations Center, where he works with the Director and Assistant Director of Operations to monitor, direct, and report on current activities as well as to plan for future mission changes. As a trained Air Force medical technician, Eric also rotates through the Point of Distribution, where he administers COVID-19 vaccinations and provides other clinical support.

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## **CSRD Contact Information**

General Mailbox: [VHABLRD-CSRD@va.gov](mailto:VHABLRD-CSRD@va.gov)

Just in Time: <https://vawww.gateway.research.va.gov/jit/Default.asp?>

Career Development: [VHACADEReview@va.gov](mailto:VHACADEReview@va.gov)

Clinical Trials: [clin-review@va.gov](mailto:clin-review@va.gov)

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