

CSRD July Newsletter

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Clinical Science Research and Development



Terri Talks

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Message from the Director

To our valued CSRD investigators,

First of all we hope each and every one of you is well and safe. We continue of course to reel from the pandemic and long-reaching tenacles as we push forward – both in our “day jobs” and in answering the call for research to develop solutions and treatments. I personally thank you for every VA effort you are extending during this time.

We took a little hiatus to answer many other demands, but with the return of this newsletter I would briefly mention:

- Our CSRD program of research on COVID-19 has been initiated with three rounds of “rapid reviews” in which we approved a total of 21 projects to start as soon as possible (see list included below). Our focus here will be on early learnings that can be further developed, and, starting to establish a community of science around the topic, assessments, and approaches.
- One critical question we will be working towards understanding administratively is the status of research, especially clinical studies that were put on hold and are now in varying phases of reopening. We’ll need to understand eventually how each project is affected, so please answer the data call/s as you see them. We’ll work together to develop the solution set.
- Dr. George Ioannou has provided CSRD with a copy of the manuscript, “Risk factors of hospitalization, mechanical ventilation or death in 10,131 US Veterans with SARS-CoV-2 Infection,” that is currently under review by JAMA. This is the first manuscript to originate from his team’s recent COVID supplement, using data from the VINCI COVID RESOURCE, augmented by its own CDW extractions. He also is working on two additional manuscripts and has been invited by Dr. David Atkins to present his findings at a COVID-EQUITY GROUP meeting.

More details are described below, but please always feel free to contact either your local VA research office for answers, or our emails as noted. With many thanks from CSRD,

Terri

Clinical Trial Updates

First trial funded under VA CURES Master Protocol

In the early stage of the pandemic shutdown, Rachel Ramoni tasked a scientific team led by CSRD to develop a master protocol to be used to test experimental therapies of SARS-CoV-2-infected Veterans. In particular, the goals were to focus on agents approved for other purposes that would be available for Veteran trial participants, and to focus initially on hospitalized patients. The master protocol has become known as VA CURES (**C**oronavir**U**s **R**esearch and **E**fficacy **S**tudies). The first trial under the master protocol, VA CURES-1, has now completed scientific review and been approved for funding. VA CURES-1 will examine the benefits of convalescent plasma to reduce the most serious outcomes of mechanical ventilation or death in a placebo-controlled clinical trial with a total target enrollment of approximately 700 Veterans. It is anticipated the trial will start enrolling towards early August. Dr. Edward Janoff from the Denver VA and Dr. Sheldon Brown from the Bronx VA are the principal investigators for VA CURES-1..

HITCH Trial Begins Enrollment

A clinical trial of degarelix, a drug used to treat prostate cancer, has enrolled its first participant. The study is known as HITCH (**H**ormonal Intervention for the **T**reatment in Veterans with **C**ovid-19 **R**equiring **H**ospitalization). At the strong urging of Dr. Stone, Research as expanded the initially planned number of enrolling sites from 4 to 15, with the hope that the enrollment target of approximately 200 hospitalized Veterans will be quickly attained. We appreciate Dr. Clancy's support in presenting to VISN leads, and realized great engagement from national leadership as a result – one VISN lead contacted the study PI directly to ask if they can participate! Dr. Matthew Rettig from the Greater Los Angeles VA is the PI.

Future COVID-19 Funding

For the 2020 fall funding round, regular mechanisms are expected to be in place. However, other service directed or CURES associated ideas may be reviewed.

CDA Opportunities Announced

Mentored Physician-Scientist Award in Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Research and Development (ORD) announces a Career Development Award (CDA) opportunity for VA physicians who are early in their scientific careers and investigating Alzheimer's disease and/or Alzheimer's disease-related dementias. The Mentored Physician-Scientist Award and Related Dementias (MPS-ADRD) is in collaboration with the National Institute of Aging (NIA). All ORD Services are participating in this RFA:

<https://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/docs/Mentored-Physician-Scientist-Award.pdf>

)Letters of Intent Receipt Date(s): Due September 16, 2020, for November 9, 2020, application submission and March 9, 2021, for May 7, 2021, application submission. For more information contact Dr. Mark Roltsch at mark.roltsch@va.gov.

Career Development Award for U.S. Military Veteran Scientists

This CDA-1 award provides an initial/early mentored research experience, consisting of up to two years of salary support, to highly qualified scientists who have not been a PI or co-PI on a peer-reviewed independent research project supported by a national, public or private organization. A clear commitment to a VA career and the support of an **appropriately qualified funded VA Merit Review Award mentor** are both required. While BLRD and CSRD require that the mentor is a VA employee, the mentoring team may also include non-VA scientists as co-mentors. The training experience should be closely integrated with the mentor's ongoing funded research. Submission of a CDA-2 application is strongly encouraged after one year into a CDA-1 award, and the CDA-2 application may be submitted without a Letter of Intent. Implicit in all Career Development applications is the understanding that the applicant plans to continue their career within VA. The RFA may be accessed at:

<https://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/docs/BX-20-021-Combined-CDA1-Veteran-Scientist.pdf>

PREVENTS Initiative Launch

Launch of the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) Initiative brings appropriate focus to suicide prevention. We remain highly interested in study ideas focused on prevention and are particularly interested in study applications on lethal means safety for suicide prevention as well as the association and potential reduction of risk related to the pandemic situation.

Virtual CADE Symposium Held

The annual BLRD and CSRD Career Development Symposium held July 13-15 was a virtual experience due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. 58 awardees (first and third year) participated representing 30 VAMCs. Awardees heard from both VA and non-VA speakers on various topics intended to help them navigate the VA research enterprise. One particular highlight was a very robust presentation on developing good grants and the transitioning from CDA to Merit Review and independence. Awardees were inspired and motivated by two alumni talks from Dr. Matthew Turner, of the Indianapolis VA and Joshua Woolley from the San Francisco VA. Awardees spent time with Service Directors discussing their concerns, challenges, and potential areas of opportunity while meeting with portfolio managers to focus on navigating and taking advantage of opportunities during their CDA years. Participants provided many suggestions for consideration which will be reviewed with responses expected by the Fall. Meeting presentations were also distributed to the awardees for their reference.

Job Postings

Applications are now being accepted for two positions in Washington, DC:

- *Health Science Officer (Precision Oncology), GS-0601-15*
 - <https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/572906900>
 - Announcement Open Period: Thursday, July 9, 2020 to Thursday, July 30, 2020
- *Health Science Officer Mental Health - Suicide Prevention, CSR&D, GS-0601-15*
 - <https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/573772500>
 - Announcement Open Period: Thursday, July 16, 2020, to Wednesday, August 5, 2020

21 COVID-19 Rapid Response Applications Funded

The 21 projects listed below, submitted in response to the Rapid Response RFA, were selected for CSR&D funding:

Mehrdad Arjomandi	Modulation of COVID-19 by Smoking: The Basis for a Clinical Trial
Ed Boyko	The contribution of diabetes to risk of adverse outcomes among veterans with COVID-19
David Canady	Pilot cellular immunology studies to examine mechanistic foundation for COVID-19 vaccine optimization and NK cell therapy in the aging VA population
Louis Dell'Italia	Type I IFN and TLR7 response regulates susceptibility to COVID-19
Jose Huizar	Role of Cardiac Magnetic Resonance in Myocardial Injury in COVID-19: A Pilot Study
George Ioannou	Risk factors and prediction models of adverse outcomes in Veterans with COVID-19
Nicholas Kenyon	Proposal to develop at-home, self-administered test for suspect or asymptomatic infections of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses
Angela Kirkpatrick	The Role of Coated-Platelets in Hypercoagulability Associated with COVID-19
Jennifer Loftis	Inflammatory and Mental Health Sequelae of COVID-19 in Veterans

Heather Mannuel	Identifying B cell/ T cell epitopes of virus SARS-CoV-2 to develop tests for screening and response evaluation in patients with a COVID-19 infection.
Micah McClain	Development of diagnostic and predictive biomarkers for COVID-19
Shaym Mohapatra	Development of predictive algorithm and AI-enhanced chest CT imaging for the screening of hospitalized COVID-19 patients
Shriram Nallamshetty	Microsampling-based multiplexed evaluation to define determinants of host response and clinical outcomes in COVID-19 infections
Lavanya Pandit	G6PD deficiency predicts outcomes from COVID-19 infection amongst veterans at highest risk for severity of illness
Calin Prodan	An investigation of ADAMTS13 in COVID
Elani Streja	Impact of renin-angiotensin system inhibitors on outcomes of COVID-19
Ayako Suzuki	VA electronic health record (EHR) analysis of COVID-19 risk factors for future prevention and care strategies
Steven Weisbord	COVID-19 and Kidney Disease in the Veteran Population
Weiming Xia	Diluting SARS-CoV-2 and receptor interaction: Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (ACEI) and Angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARB)
Mohammed Zayed	Chronic Anti-Coagulation Therapy in COVID-19 Positive Patients
David Zidar	Linking Immunologic Phenotypes and COVID-19 Respiratory Failure: Rapid pilot studies to integrate epidemiologic, radiomic, and immunologic monitoring to guide future precision interventions.

CSRD Contact Information

Please contact us with your questions or concerns:

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