

Briefings

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Director's Update

Last year we outlined our strategic planning process. We also shared several exciting initiatives focused on enhancing our clinical and educational programing. One was to provide small pilot grants to clinicians and educators across the VISN.

Later this year we will be holding a "Demo Day" to present the eight projects. We are also embarking on a second year of partnership with the Duke University Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program. The purpose of this series of webinars is to increase access to clinical training and education for community-based providers of mental health services in our more rural areas. We will continue to disseminate these webinars.

As we begin a new fiscal year, we wanted to showcase another important part of our strategic planning. Our goals are to support career development of young researchers while also

supporting the growth of our current research. We previously described our research pilot grants. These focused on accelerating the progress of junior level investigators. We will be holding a "Research Demo Day" to present these projects later this year. Over the next few newsletters, I will also be highlighting several of our cutting-edge research projects. Some are in our foundational areas of PTSD, TBI, and Substance Use. Others are in emerging areas such as suicide, violence, and pain or involve the special needs of particular groups including those of women Veterans, families, and the First Personal Gulf War. In this newsletter, I will share our research in Substance Abuse.

Smoking Cessation:

Drs. Jean Beckham, Patrick Calhoun, and their colleagues are developing new interventions to reduce smoking among Veterans. Their focus is on innovative approaches that target groups with higher rates of smoking. One is Veterans that are more difficult in engage in care, such as homeless Veterans, Veterans living in rural areas, and OIF/OIF Veterans. Another is Veterans with more complex problems, such as those with schizophrenia and primary care patients with chronic medical illnesses and depression. Their innovative interventions include home visits or mobile health apps to enhance provider care.

They are also mentoring several young researchers. Dr. Sarah Wilson is a postdoctoral fellow in psychology. She is conducting a survey to learn more about women Veterans' experiences, perceptions and treatment barriers related to smoking cessation. The goal is to learn whether gender-specific and pregnancy-specific resources may be helpful for smoking cessation programs targeting women Veterans. Dr. Eric Dedert has received a VA Career Development Award. He is evaluating several alcohol and smoking interventions for Veterans with and without PTSD.

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Director's Update

This team is also evaluating an important public health question. What causes the higher risk of inflammation and cardiovascular problems seen with PTSD? Is it a result of initial trauma exposure or due to the development of PTSD?

New Medications:

Dr. Christine Marx is developing new medications. One focus is to help Veterans with Bipolar Disorder and Alcohol Use Disorder. She is also evaluating biological responses to Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD. Her goal is to identify medications that may enhance the treatment.

Understanding Mechanisms:

Dr. Scott Moore is conducting several animal model studies to learn more about how ethanol (the kind of alcohol we drink) effects the brain. He is specifically interested in identifying the parts of the brain responsible for reinforcing the use of alcohol. These studies may help us better understand how drug dependence and drug withdrawal works and what treatments may be needed. He is also mentoring Dr. Rebecca Klein's research using animal models of TBI. They are looking at how different genes and hormones interact to increase the risk of TBI. They are also evaluating whether hormone replacement therapy might help reduce that risk.

In the next two newsletter updates, I will share our newest research work in PTSD, TBI, suicide, violence, pain, and Gulf War Veterans.

John A. Fairbark, Ph.D.

Director, Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC

Focus on the VISN

Honors & Awards

Dr. Jean Beckham (MIRECC Co-Associate Director, Research & Genetics Lab Director) has been awarded the 2017 Robert S. Laufer, PhD, Memorial Award for Outstanding Scientific Achievement by the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS). The Laufer Award is the ISTSS highest honor for individuals whose scientific achievements have advanced knowledge on the nature, assessment and treatment of traumatic stress!





Dr. Mira Brancu (MIRECC Deputy Director) has been awarded 2016 paper of the year by Archives of Suicide Research for her manuscript Are There Linguistic Markers of Suicidal Writing That Can Predict the Course of Treatment? A Repeated Measures Longitudinal Analysis. An International Academy of Suicide Research committee composed of international experts reviewed all the manuscripts for 2016 and selected her manuscript as the best!

Focus on the VISN

New Grants

PI: Dr. Eric Elbogen (MIRECC Faculty, Durham site), Neuromodulatory Treatments for Pain Management in Complex TBI using Mobile Technology. Funded by: Department of Defense Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs

PI: **Dr. Raj Morey** (MIRECC Faculty, & Neuroimaging Lab Director), *Trauma and Genomics Modulate Brain Structure across Common Psychiatric Disorders* Funded by: National Institute of Mental Health

PI: Jason Nieuwsma (MIRECC Faculty, Associate Director, VA MH & Chaplaincy Program), Equipping Faith Communities and Clergy to Care for Veterans and Persons with Mental Health Problems Funded by: the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation

Co-Pls: Jason Nieuwsma (MIRECC Faculty, Associate Director, VA MH & Chaplaincy Program), Heather King & Kimber Parry *Moral Injury in Rural Veterans* Funded by: the VA Office of Rural Health

PI: **Dr. Chris Marx** MIRECC Co-Associate Director, Research & Interventiona and Metabolomics Lab Director), *Biomarker Candidates in Gulf War Veterans* Funded by: VA Merit Review

PI: **Dr. Steven Szabo** MIRECC Faculty, Durham site), **Neurosteroids in PTSD** – **Biomarkers to Therapeutics** Funded by: VA Career Development Award

Focus on the VISN

Clinical Project IMPETUS-V: IMproving Pain Education and Update Treatment for US Veterans

This project began with the award of a Clinical Core Pilot grant to **Dr Jennifer Naylor** (Co-Assistant Director, Clinical & Interventions and Metabolomics Lab Assistant Director). Chronic pain conditions are a critical problem for a lot of Military Veterans. These are often costly both in terms of increased healthcare needs and reduced quality of life. Chronic pain conditions are routinely treated in primary care clinics. Treatment can be challenging because Veterans often report additional mental health and physical symptoms. The VA is committed to providing integrated pain care treatment. However, considerable challenges for effective pain care remain. A key issue is that medical providers receive little pain management education in medical school. In addition, pain management is often not required as part of ongoing medical education.

One aim of this MIRECC-funded project was to develop pain care management education for primary care providers and patient aligned care teams. This training was then tested with primary care providers at the Durham VA. Three one-hour chronic pain management training sessions were developed. The first session is educational material presented in a traditional classroom style. The second session is interactive. It is focused on discussion of relevant clinical case scenarios. The third session is with our interdisciplinary pain team. It provides an opportunity for providers to discuss their clinical cases with the team. Providers were more confident in their ability to provide effective pain care improved following these interdisciplinary trainings. Providers who participated in all three trainings (8 providers) were more confident than providers receiving only the first session (46 providers). Providers therefore may have benefited the most from applying the knowledge gained from the classroom-style session during clinical case discussions. These results suggest there is value in pain management training, and that inclusion of clinical case discussions following classroom-style training sessions may provide the greatest benefit.

A second goal of this project was to develop a pain management course for Veterans with chronic pain conditions. Veteran education materials have been developed to help Veterans understand the various ways pain can impact function. Information is provided about the multiple approaches for treatment, including non-medication interventions. The risks of opioid medications are addressed. Veterans also learn how to better communicate with their providers about their pain. Veteran trainings will begin in fall 2017.

The courses have been designed so that they can be delivered by qualified staff at other VA and community facilities. Both sets of training materials include professionally designed PowerPoint presentations and detailed treatment manuals. These will be made generally available. Distribution methods are currently being explored.

In the News!!!

Dr. Katherine Cunningham (MIRECC Fellow, Durham site) and colleagues authored the paper *A Relative Weights Comparison of Trauma-Related Shame and Guilt as Predictors of DSM-5 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptom Severity Among US Veterans and Military Members.* It was published online on October 23 and featured in a press release by the British Psychological Society. Within a few days the study had already been covered by eight media outlets, earning an altmetric score of 64!

The psychological toll of shame in military personnel.

https://beta.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/psychological-toll-shame-militarypersonnel

Invited Lectures

Dr. Chris Marx (MIRECC Co-Associate Director, Research & Interventions and Metabolomics Lab Director), presented Neurosteroids in PTSD and Co-Occurring Conditions – Biomarkers and Therapeutics at the North Carolina Psychiatric Association meeting in September in Myrtle Beach, NC and Neurosteroid Signatures and Biomarker Candidates in PTSD at the Combat PTSD conference in October in San Antonio, TX.

Drs. Keith Meador (MIRECC Faculty & Director, VA MH & Chaplaincy Program) and Jason Nieuwsma (MIRECC Faculty, Associate Director, VA MH & Chaplaincy Program) presented the full day workshop Building a community of care: Integrating chaplaincy with mental health and other care services in July at Fort Bragg, NC. Dr. Nieuwsma presented Re-examining invisible wounds of war: Looking beyond PTSD to issues of moral injury in September as part of the Duke Psychiatry Web Conference Series, Durham, NC. Drs. Jackson, King & Nieuwsma presented Development of a Long Standing Implementation Partnership between Mental Health Services and HSR&D: Integrating Mental Health and Chaplaincy across VA and DOD on October 16 as part of the VA HSR&D Spotlight on Mental Health CyberSeminar series.

Dr. Jennifer Naylor (Co-Assistant Director, Clinical) presented *Addressing the Challenges of Chronic Pain Management* as part of Duke Medical Center Gl Grand Rounds in April, Durham, NC

Dr. Cindy Swinkels (MIRECC Faculty & Coaching into Care) presented Behavioral Sleep Medicine - Sleep Across the Lifespan and Coaching Into Care - A National VA Call Center for Familty and Friends of Veterans at the 8th Annual Forward March Training Seminar & Symposium in October at Fort Bragg, NC

Focus on the VISN

Upcoming Webinar

Wednesday November 29, 12-1 pm (ET) 2017 Clinician's Update on the Dementias: Diagnosis, Course, and Treatment Presented by Dr. John Beyer

Objectives:

- Discuss the new DSM5 diagnostic criteria for Dementia/Major Neurocognitive Disorders.
- * Examine the prevalence of Major Neurocognitive Disorders.
- Identify five common types of Major Neurocognitive Disorders.
- Note the clinical course and expectations in patients with cognitive changes.
- * Review current treatment recommendations.
- * Consider challenges posed by the disease due to behavioral changes, caregiver burden, public and healthcare policy.

use this link to register & to attend:

https://dukemed.webex.com/dukemed/onstage/g.php?MTID=e301935207e59 1e16a8c83e1e3509e1ee

First register for the event and then log-in. The password will be 1234. The webinar will be broadcast so use your speakers to listen. If you experience problems dial: 1-650-479-3207.

Contact: Althea Bell, SR-AHEC email: Althea.Bell@sr-ahec.org telephone: 910-678-0112



In affiliation with Duke University Medical Center Part of the NC AHEC Program

Upcoming Webinar

Wednesday December 13, 1-2 pm (ET)
Evidence-based Synthesis: Interventions to Support Caregivers or Families of Patients with TBI, PTSD, or Polytrauma

Presented by Drs. Mira Brancu & Megan Shepherd-Banigan

Family members perform a significant service caring for Veterans with severe physical, mental, and cognitive impairments. Depending on the injuries and health conditions, for some families, the need for intensive family caregiving support can last for decades. Further, caregiving can have negative implications for the caregiver's physical and mental health, employment, and financial security. There is a need to better understand the impact of interventions that support caregivers or families of patients with disabling conditions common among Veterans. This evidence synthesis describes the volume of published literature evaluating the effects of family caregiving support programs for patients with traumatic brain injury (TBI), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or polytrauma. The synthesis authors will discuss the findings to two key questions:

- * For which patient groups that receive interventions that involve family members has the impact on care recipient outcomes been assessed?
- * What effects do programs or strategies that involve family caregivers have on care recipient and caregiver outcomes?

use this link to register:

https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/1773034354200879361



National Service

Dr. Katherine Taber (MIRECC Assistant Director, Education) has been appointed to VA RR&D Scientific Merit Review Board, Career Development Award Program Subcommittee

New Personnel

Crystal Barnes joined the MIRECC on September 5 to become a Psychology Technician for Dr. Cindy Swinkels, working in the Coaching Into Care Program. She will also be assisting with travel requests.

Ellie Kim joined the MIRECC on September 5 to become a Psychology Technician for Dr. Lester-Williams and Dr. Kumpula, working in the Evidence-Based Psychotherapy Programs. Her primary responsibilities are to manage data in support of the EBP programs and carry out other administrative tasks.

Alana Higgins joined the MIRECC on October 30 to become Research Coordinator for the Translational Clinical Neurosciences Collaborative (Salisbury Site).

Conferences

National Academy of Neuropsychology



Miskey H, Martindale S, Shura R, Taber K. Distress tolerance and symptom severity mediate failure on a symptom validity test in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. Oral presentation

Invited CE Workshop:

Challenges Associated with TBI Research and Clinical Practice in the DoD and VA: Diagnostics, Pathology, & Ethics

Patrick Armistead-Jehle, PhD

Wesley R. Cole, PhD

Robert D. Shura, PsyD

Munson Army Health Center

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center

W. G. (Bill) Hefner VAMC

This workshop covered various topics related to clinical care and empirical investigation with active duty service members (SM) and veterans who have experienced mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI). The presentation were broken down into three sections, with each section including discussion of recent research, applied clinical guidance, and ethical considerations. The first section covered screening and initial assessment of mTBI and included discussions on the potential iatrogenic effects of system-wide screenings, use of computerized neurocognitive assessment tools (NCAT) such as the ANAM, and the consistency of self-reported injuries across the active duty and veteran cycle of care. The second section highlighted aspects of the pathophysiology of concussion due to blast injury, an injury mechanism relatively unique to SMs and veterans, by presenting preliminary data from a Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium (CENC)-funded study on primary blast injury. The final section of this workshop covered topics relating to clinical guidelines for the treatment of mTBI, with recent research on return to duty protocols discussed, as well as the potential consequences of misdiagnosed postconcussive symptoms in VA disability evaluations. The audience obtained an understanding of the unique challenges and ethical considerations that exist in research and clinical practice with service members with mTBI.



Nieuwsma JA, Brancu M, Kopacz MS, Meador KG. Religious service attendance and suicidality among post-9/11 veterans. Poster

72nd Annual Meeting, May 15, 2017, San Diego, CA



Symposium

C Marx (Chair & Speaker) Neurosteroids and Inflammatory Markers in PTSD and TBI



Marx C. A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Neurosteroid Intervention in Schizophrenia. Oral presentation

Publications

Management Brief

Shepherd-Banigan ME, McDuffie JR, Shapiro A, **Brancu M**, Sperber N, Mehta NN, Van Houtven CH, Williams JW Jr. *Interventions to Support Caregivers or Families of Patients with TBI, PTSD, or Polytrauma: A Systematic Review.* VA ESP Project #09-009; 2017. http://vaww.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/management_briefs/default.cfm?ManagementBriefsMenu=eBrief-no132

Key Questions Addressed: [1] For which patient groups (ie, patients with posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or polytrauma) that receive interventions that involve family members has the impact on care recipient outcomes been assessed? [2] What effects do programs or strategies that involve family caregivers have on care recipient and caregiver outcomes? Outcomes of interest include caregiver burden and psychological symptoms; care recipient functional status, psychological symptoms, quality-of-life indicators, disease-specific symptoms, independence, health care utilization; and family economic status, family functioning, and clinical eligibility for specific programs or services.

Journal Articles

Brancu M, Wagner HR, Morey RA, Beckham JC, Calhoun PS, Tupler LA, Marx CE, Taber KH, Hurley RA, Rowland J, McDonald SD, Hoerle JM, Moore SD, Weiner RD, VA Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Work Group, Fairbank JA. The Post Deployment Mental Health (PDMH) Study and Repository: A Multi-Site Study of U.S. Afghanistan and Iraq Era Veterans. International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research. 2017; 26(3): e1570 doi: 10.1002/mpr.1570

Calhoun PS, Wilson SM, Hertzberg JS, Kirby AC, McDonald SD, Dennis PA, Bastian LA, Dedert EA, Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Post-Deployment Mental Health Study Workgroup, Beckham JC. Validation of Veterans Affairs Electronic Medical Record Smoking Data among Iraq- and Afghanistan-Era Veterans. Journal of General Internal Medicine. 2017;32(11):1228-1234. doi: 10.1007/s11606-017-4144-5.

Cook JW, Baker TB, Beckham JC, McFall M. Smoking-induced affect modulation in non-withdrawn smokers with posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and in those with no psychiatric disorder. Journal of Abnormal Psychology. 2017; 126 (2): 184-198. doi: 10.1037/abn0000247.

Green KT, Wilson SM, Dennis PA, Runnals JJ, Williams RA, Bastian LA, Beckham JC, Dedert EA, Kudler HS, Straits-Tröster K, Gierisch JM, Calhoun PS. Cigarette Smoking and Musculoskeletal Pain Severity Among Male and Female Afghanistan/Iraq Era Veterans. Pain Medicine. 2017 Sep 1;18(9):1795-1804. doi: 10.1093/pm/pnw339.

Kimbrel NA, Calhoun PS, Beckham JC. *Nonsuicidal self-injury in men: A serious problem that has been overlooked for too long.* World Psychiatry. 16 (1): 108-109. doi: 10.1002/wps.20358. No abstract available. PMID:28127935.

Martindale SL, Hurley RA, Taber KH. Neurobiology and Neuroimaging of Chronic Hepatitis C Virus: Implications for Neuropsychiatry. Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience. 2017 Fall; 29(4): A6 – 307.

WINDOWS TO THE BRAIN: This article addresses the Core Competency of Medical Knowledge

Mitchell JT, McIntyre EM, English JS, Dennis MF, Beckham JC, Kollins SH. A Pilot Trial of Mindfulness Meditation Training for ADHD in Adulthood: Impact on Core Symptoms, Executive Functioning, and Emotion Dysregulation. Journal of Attention Disorders. 2017; 21(13): 1105-1120. doi: 10.1177/1087054713513328.

Naylor JC, Ryan Wagner H, Brancu M, Shepherd-Banigan M, Elbogen E, Kelley M, Fecteau T, Goldstein K, Kimbrel NA, Marx CE; VA Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Work Group.; VA Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Women Veterans Work Group., Strauss JL. Self-Reported Pain in Male and Female Iraq/Afghanistan-Era Veterans: Associations with Psychiatric Symptoms and Functioning. Pain Medicine. 2017; 18(9):1658-1667. doi: 10.1093/pm/pnw308

Ogle CM, Siegler IC, Beckham JC, Rubin DC. *Neuroticism increases posttraumatic stress disorder symptom severity by amplifying the emotionality, rehearsal, and centrality of trauma memories.* Journal of Personality. 2017 Oct;85(5):702-715. doi: 10.1111/jopy.12278.

Ulmer CS, Bosworth HB, Beckham JC, Germain A, Jeffreys AS, Edelman D, Macy S, Kirby A, Voils CI. Veterans Affairs primary care providers' perceptions of insomnia treatment: A pilot study. Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine. 2017;13(8):991-999. doi: 10.5664/jcsm.6702. http://jcsm.aasm.org/ViewAbstract.aspx?pid=31073

BRIEF SUMMARY: Prior research has not examined primary care provider (PCP) perspectives on treatment within the Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system. This study was conducted to expand the existing literature with data from the VA health care setting. Despite increased availability of cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia within the VA, this study reveals the need for additional systems-level changes. Specifically, PCP education and practice standards are needed to increase patient access to evidence-based insomnia treatments.

Commentary on article: http://jcsm.aasm.org/ViewAbstract.aspx?pid=31066

Resources for Veterans & Families

http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/self_help.asp

Resources to Empower Veterans Mental Health

Self-help materials can provide valuable education and support for Veterans who may be facing mental health challenges, their friends, and family members. There are a wide variety of self-help materials available and it can sometimes be difficult to select the most useful. VA has assembled a list of reviewer-recommended materials that may be helpful in finding the right option for you. For help in finding these materials, please click the "How to Use" tab.



Online Life Skills Training for Veterans

There are several free and anonymous on-line education and life coaching programs that use interactive exercises and video demonstrations to teach skills for overcoming life challenges. http://www.veterantraining.va.gov/

Anger Management

This online course is based on training that was developed specifically for Veterans and has been successfully used by Veterans and Service Members around the world. This course offers a wide range of practical skills and tools to manage your anger and develop self-control over your thoughts and actions

Moving Forward

This online course teaches skills to help you overcome stressful problems and meet your goals. Moving Forward is designed for Veterans and Service Members who are facing challenges including:

- Managing Stress
- Balancing school & family
- Relationship problems
- Coping with physical injuries
- Financial difficulties

Veteran Parenting

This course provides parents with tools that strengthen parenting skills and helps them reconnect with their children. The course:

- Helps parents deal with both everyday problems and family issues that are unique to the military lifestyle.
- •Features stories from actual Veteran/military families, interactive activities, and practical parenting tips.





http://www.nc4vets.com/blog/resource-guide

The NC4VETS Resource Guide is produced and published by the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to assist and educate veterans in learning about state and federal veteran benefits. The 2017 edition is now available.

Provider Education



CBOC Mental Health Rounds

Each CBOC MH Rounds presentation is now offered twice a month: Caregiving: Trends and Successful Interventions

Wednesday Nov 8 from 9-10 am ET & Thursday Nov 9 from 12-1 pm ET Remember to register in TMS in advance to attend and receive credit.

If you require assistance contact:

Dec 13 & 14 Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health -Veterans Enhanced Treatment (REACH VET)

EES Program Manager - Tim.Walsh2@va.gov or Education Tech - Jessica. Denno@va.gov



PACERS is pleased to announce a **new** "Dementia and Delirium" education module in our curriculum on cognitive disorders. Each module is accredited for 1 hour of CE and is available to VA providers in the VA Talent Management System.

Dementia and Delirium **TMS ID 29817**

Dementia is a major public health concern, affecting over 5 million Americans, of whom over 560,000 are Veterans. The incidence of dementia increases with age, with more than 90% of those affected aged over 60 years. It is one of the most costly chronic conditions that the VA treats and its financial impact is expected to grow with the increasing number of aging Veterans. This course will describe two of the most common neurocognitive disorders that occur among elderly

Dementia and Driving **TMS ID 28776**

One of the most challenging issues clinicians must address when working with Veterans with dementia is declines in driving skills. Approximately 30-45% of persons with dementia continue to drive, placing them at risk for becoming lost, crashing, and other adverse events. Clinicians have recognized a gap in knowledge regarding how to address diminished driving skills and decision-making for drivers with dementia. This training module will provide practical information that clinicians and health care teams can use in their work with older drivers with dementia and their families.



This workshop series was developed by MIRECC faculty in collaboration with Citizen Soldier Support Program (CSSP) and North Carolina Area Health Education Center (NC AHEC). The web-based versions of the courses are all free at: http://www.ahecconnect.com/citizensoldier

- 1 Treating the Invisible Wounds of War (TTIWW)
- english & spanish editions 2 - TTIWW - A Primary Care Approach
- 3 TTIWW Employee Assistance in the CivilianWorkforce
- 4 TTIWW Issues of Women Returning from Combat
- 5 TTIWW Recognizing the Signs of mTBI during **Routine Eye Examinations**
- 6 TTIWW Understanding Military Family Issues
- 7 TTIWW Taking a Military History: Four Critical Ouestions



UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY

of the Health Sciences











Module 1: Self-Assessment & Introduction to Military Ethos Module 3: Stressors & Resources

Module 2: Military Organization & Roles Module 4: Treatment, Resources & Tools







www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6

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