



VISN 6 Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Post Deployment Mental Health

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Vol 3 (4) August 2007



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Introduction to the Research Cores: Genetics

Jean C. Beckham, Ph.D.

Many mental disorders clearly are influenced by genetics. Conditions such as major depression and schizophrenia, for example, occur more frequently in close relatives than in the population as a whole. The search for particular genetic variations that might be causally related to specific mental illnesses is an ongoing effort. Success could transform parts of psychiatry toward a neuroscience-based discipline.



This is an exciting time for genetics studies. The sequence of the whole human genome is now available. The majority of common variations have been identified. New technologies now arriving in academic research laboratories are expected to facilitate the search. Identification of genes is expected to explain a large proportion of the risk of developing mental disorders. So far, a number of risk genes have been identified, but no major gene has emerged. The majority of these genes participate in the regulation of biogenic amines that play critical roles in the emotion and reward systems.

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In the News!



Durham study to probe benefits of guided imagery for PTSD

MIRECC research on the use of guided imagery for treatment of PTSD, lead by **Dr. Jennifer Strauss**, was featured in the July issue of *Research Currents*. Also profiled were companion studies that will assess the effects of stress prior to and following treatment. **Dr. Raj Morey** leads the functional imaging study. **Dr. Chris Marx** leads the neurosteroids study.



http://www.research.va.gov/resources/pubs/docs/va_research_currents_july_07.pdf

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In the News!

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July 20, 2007

Blast-Related Traumatic Brain Injury: What Is Known?

Deployment Health News recently featured a review article written by the leaders of our MIRECC's Education component, **Robin Hurley MD** and **Katherine Taber PhD** in collaboration with **Deborah Warden MD** (Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center).

<http://www.pdhealth.mil/newsletter.asp?date=7/20/2007>

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Outreach

Dr. Jennifer Strauss has presented her innovative work at two recent veteran and soldier oriented conferences.

10th Annual Force Health Protection Conference



Force Health Protection Through Collaboration

"A Brief, Transportable Intervention for Women Veterans with PTSD Related to Military Sexual Trauma"

AMVETS 63rd NATIONAL CONVENTION



"Effects of Military Sexual Trauma on Women Veterans"

Publications

Martin M, Hurley RA, Taber KH. Is opiate addiction associated with long standing neurobiological changes? *J Neuropsychiatry Clin Neurosci* 2007 Summer; 19(3):242-248.

McFall M, Saxon AJ, Thaneemit-Chen S, Smith MW, Joseph AM, Carmody TP, Beckham JC, Malte CA, Vertrees JE, Boardman KD, Lavori PW. Integrating smoking cessation into mental health care for post-traumatic stress disorder. *Clin Trials*. 2007;4(2):178-89

Invited Lectures

On August 21, **Dr. Robin Hurley** (Co-Director, Education) presented "Post-acute Management of Emotional and Behavioral Problems in TBI" as part of the Polytrauma Support Clinic Teams Conference held in Chicago. The purpose of this conference was to provide current information and access to fellow rehabilitation providers responsible for the polytrauma system of care to facilitate effective management of the polytrauma support clinic teams.

Recent Presentations

Newman CF, Strauss JL. *Finding the "golden mean" of stress and growth in the therapeutic relationship with patients with personality disorders.* World Congress of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Barcelona, Spain, July 2007.

Strauss JL, Marx CE, Oddone EZ, O'Loughlin SH, Butterfield MI. *A transportable PTSD intervention shows promise for women veterans with military sexual trauma.* VISN 22 Complementary Alternative Medicine Conference, July 2007.

Transforming Mental Health Care: Promoting Recovery & Integrated Care

July 17-20, 2007 Alexandria VA



Presentations from our MIRECC:

Burden JL. From Education and Outreach to Comprehensive Treatment for Substance Use Disorders: The VISN 6 Model for SUD Treatment Program Collaboration.

Calnaido RP. MD Neuroactive Steroids and Self-Reported Pain in Veterans Who Served During OEF/OIF

Marx CE. Proof-of-Concept Trial with the Neurosteroid Pregnenolone Targeting Neurocognitive and Negative Symptoms in Schizophrenia.

McDonald SD, Beckham JC, Tupler LA, Morey R, Marx CE, Calhoun PC. Utility of the Davidson Trauma Scale in OIF/OEF Veterans.

Pannu Hayes JK. Neural systems for executive and emotional processing are modulated by level of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in Iraq war veterans.

Payne VM. Neuroactive Steroids are Related to Psychiatric Symptoms in Veterans Who Served During Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Straits-Troster K. Health Risk Behaviors and QOL Among OEF/OIF Veterans Seeking VA Healthcare in FY2005.

Taber KH. VISN 6 MIRECC: A Multi-Level Approach to Transforming Post-Deployment Mental Health Care.

Introduction to the Research Cores: Genetics

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The focus of our MIRECC is post deployment mental health. The Genetics research core will carefully evaluate the influence of genetics on the development of mental disorders, including PTSD, following exposure to trauma. Our first study will examine the influence of genes known to affect the serotonin neurotransmitter system. In the future, we expect to conduct the first whole genome analysis. There are many potential benefits to identifying genetic variations associated with particular mental disorders. One is that it may provide a way to evaluate an individual's risk for developing a mental disorder. It may also allow selection of the best medication type and dose for an individual, based on their genetic profile. It may even allow development of preventive measures. In addition, it is expected that genetic studies will suggest new targets for medication development.

New Collaborations

Dr. Ruth Yoash-Gantz (Salisbury VAMC) is working with **Dr. Heather Belanger** (Tampa VAMC) on a new study "*Cognitive Sequelae of Blast-Induced Mild TBI*". The purpose of the study is to examine patterns of performance on neuropsychological measures in veterans who have sustained mild brain injuries as a result of exposure to explosions.



In the News!

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www.va.gov/enviroagents

Information for Veterans Who Served in Iraq and Afghanistan and Their Families
Vol. 4, No. 1 April 2007

Two MIRECC components contributed articles for the *OIF/OEF Review's* new series "Mental Health and Combat Veterans".

QUICK GUIDE TO TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Katherine H. Taber PhD and Robin A. Hurley MD
Mid-Atlantic Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center
W.G. "Bill" Hefner VA Medical Center, Salisbury NC

READJUSTMENT AFTER DEPLOYMENT

Kristy Straits-Tröster, PhD & Harold Kudler, MD
VA Mid-Atlantic Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) Durham, North Carolina

<http://www1.va.gov/enviroagents/>

MIRECC Clinical & Research Collaboration: Needs Assessment Study

Kristy Straits-Troster, PhD (Acting Co Director, MIRECC Clinical) is leading a three-part OEF/OIF Needs Assessment. Part 1 was presented in a previous newsletter (volume 3(2) April 07). Part 2 was recently completed by MIRECC clinical and health services research investigators. It was a qualitative study using focus groups to determine OIF/OEF veterans' health and family concerns, sources of support, use of VA healthcare and preferences for information and care. The focus groups were conducted in Raleigh NC. Each of the 6 groups had 10-12 participants. Group members were chosen to represent particular aspects of the OEF/OIF veteran cohort:



- 2-Active Duty, Separated, Male
- 2-Reserves/National Guard, Male
- 1-Female veterans
- 1-Non veteran spouse, female

Common areas of concern emerged from the focus groups, centered around 4 major themes:

Health concerns while deployed - safety and effectiveness of chemoprophylaxis; chemical exposures; burn pit smoke exposure; unhygienic latrines; food safety

Post-deployment problems - social avoidance; noise sensitivity; anger; impatience/irritability; sleep problems; hearing loss; chronic joint pain

Top 5 services of interest - help dealing with anger; stress; marriage and family counseling; more information about benefits and services; job and school counseling

Recommendations - More education after demobilization; more web-based information; knowledgeable unit liaisons; easier VA appointment access; more caring staff; decrease stigma; offer evening and weekend clinics; use peer supports

Results will be used to inform the design of Part 3, a planned VISN-wide survey to further guide clinical program development.

A summary of the focus group report can be obtained by contacting Dr. Kristy Straits-Troster at kristy.straits-troster2@va.gov or Dr. Harold Kudler at harold.kudler@va.gov.

Noon V-tel Lecture Schedule:**September 14**

Dr. Paula Myers (**James A. Haley VAMC, Tampa FL**)
Audiology and Polytrauma: Blast Injury to the Ear

October 12

Dr. Jennifer L. Burden & Dr. Steven J. Lash (**Salem VAMC**)
Substance Use and Abuse Among OEF/OIF Veterans

November 9

Dr. W. Vaughn McCall (**Wake Forest University**)
"A Psychiatric Perspective on Sleep Disorders"

This series is presented by V-tel and audio conferences. We are having increasing participation from sites outside VISN 6. Our assigned call in numbers may change, depending upon how many sites expect to join in. For this reason, the number that each VISN 6 site will use to dial in will be included in an email notification prior to each presentation.

If you wish to attend from a site outside of VISN 6, please contact Mary Peoples (mary.peoples1@va.gov; 704-638-9000 ext 2956) so she can make the necessary arrangements.