

VA researchers given chance to show off their work

BY JANICE GIBBS | TELEGRAM STAFF
Saturday, Apr 28, 2012 4:30 AM

VA researchers who toil in labs and clinics searching for solutions to help the veteran and civilian population do so without much local recognition.

Earlier this week, those investigators got the chance to shine a spotlight on their work during VA National Research Week.

There are about 115 studies going on within the Central Texas Veterans Health Care System.

“What you do over here is important to us,” Dr. William Harper, chief of staff at the Central Texas Veterans Health Care System, told researchers at a reception in their honor.

Clinicians know the importance of developing new information, procedures and medications, Harper said.

In addition to poster presentations, a few of the investigators spoke about their work.

“By 2020, the World Health Organization estimates the primary killer worldwide will be cardiovascular disease and stroke,” said Dr. Ken Baker, director of A&M’s division of molecular cardiology and holder of the Mayborn Chair in Cardiovascular Research at Scott & White.

At the fundamental level, Baker said, his division is interested in translating bench research into the clinical setting.

The entities that make up the local medical and education community truly do collaborate, he said.

Many of the molecular cardiology investigators based at the VA are also funded by the VA, Baker said.

“We’re all in the department of medicine at Scott & White and many of us receive our salaries from the college of medicine,” he said.

In addition, many VA researchers have education components, teaching medical students, residents and fellows, Baker said.

Dr. Chetan Jinadatha, chief of infectious disease at the VA, discussed his project about decontaminating patient care environments.

Microorganisms preceded humans on earth and will likely outlast our stay, Jinadatha said.

Jinadatha's study involves a Xenex portable room disinfection device that uses pulses of blue ultraviolet light throughout a patient room to quickly destroy viruses, bacteria and bacterial spores.

The study compared standard human cleaning of patient rooms to rooms where the disinfection system was used, looking at MRSA and bacteria.

The device was superior and more importantly its outcomes were consistent, he said.

Dr. Deborah Little, neuroimaging and genetics core leader with the Center of Excellence for Research on Returning War Veterans in Waco, talked about the role of imaging in genetics research.

"We'll cover everything from head injury to post-traumatic stress disorder to depression, to Parkinson's to Alzheimer's," Little said.

It's a big issue right now, trying to understand what the link is to head injury and everything bad that comes after, she said.

"Any neurodegenerative disease you can come up with is more significant following a head injury," Little said.

However, before a treatment can be developed, an understanding of the conditions' similarities is needed, she said.

Little is also involved in the Department of Defense research looking at new techniques in imaging to determine if it can be used to diagnose head injuries, with a heavy focus on mild injuries.

Latter steps in that research would involve validating the technique and coming up with the tools required to move treatments into a clinical setting.

Little, who has been in Waco for eight months, decided to join the Center of Excellence in Waco because of its commitment to mission.

"No place else compares," she said.

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