The research portfolio of the Mid-Atlantic MIRECC spans the translational science continuum from pre-clinical laboratory studies to implementation of evidence-based mental health treatments for Veterans throughout VA and beyond. Under the leadership of Drs. Scott Moore (Director) and Rebecca Klein (Assistant Director), our Neuroscience Laboratory is conducting cutting-edge research to understand the complex cellular and molecular mechanisms involved in brain function. To this end, the Neuroscience Lab develops and refines pre-clinical models of psychiatric conditions affecting Veterans, with an emphasis on traumatic brain injury (TBI) and substance abuse. Innovations include developing and a repeated mild TBI (rmTBI) mouse model that recapitulates key symptomatic aspects seen among Veterans with mTBI. I am excited that the Neuroscience Lab has recently implemented an automated home cage monitoring system to continuously assess the effects of TBI, sex, and genetic factors on behavioral function across the lifespan. Current findings show that female mice are more significantly impacted by the acute effects of rmTBI and display a higher preference to self-administer alcohol than males. The Neuroscience Lab has also found that the APOE4 allele, a genetic risk factor for Alzheimer’s disease, differentially affects alcohol preference on the basis of sex and injury across the lifespan. Findings indicate that sex and genetic factors may increase vulnerability to negative outcomes associated with TBI, including cognitive decline and alcohol abuse. The Neuroscience Lab is continuing to innovate and refine pre-clinical models to identify protein biomarkers and screen potential pharmacotherapies to ameliorate the long-term effects of TBI and substance abuse.

Although Black History Month may have formally ended on February 28, our MIRECC continues to address health disparities among Veterans through our research, education and clinical mission. Future issues of the newsletter will highlight our efforts to address our work in this critical area of local, regional and national impact.

John A. Fairbank, PhD
Director, Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC
The VA National Chaplain Service announced plans for the FY21 Community Clergy Training Initiative, with funding support from VA’s Office of Rural Health. The invitation extended to Chaplain Service Lines at VA facilities across the country. Those that accepted the invitation to participate will work in collaboration with their local Suicide Prevention Coordinator to host 1-2 virtual events for community clergy. In support of this effort, VA’s Mental Health and Chaplaincy (MH&C) program has worked in collaboration with the National Chaplain Service to identify and share existing MH&C resources, including videos specifically designed for clergy and faith communities who are interested in collaborating in care in support of Veterans. The video clips include reflections from Veterans, clergy from different denominations, and mental health providers that are intended to provide some educational information and prompt discussions about how to better care for Veterans and create places of community and belonging. The MH&C team also hosted two brief calls, one in late January and one in early February, for VA Chaplains who expressed an interest in learning more about the materials, lessons learned from prior use of the materials, and available support resources (e.g. brief facilitator’s guide and discussion questions). Approximately 52 facilities have indicated they plan to host at least one Community Clergy Training as part of the FY21 efforts and 35 facilities have expressed interest in using or learning more about available MH&C materials in support of this work. For more information, click here.

Community Services

Recently, Dr. Rajendra Morey (MIRECC Faculty & Neuroimaging Lab Director), started volunteering as a COVID-19 vaccinator at the Southern High School in Durham. His desire was to volunteer his time and work in an underserved area with a diverse patient population, including Veterans and the general public. Dr. Morey stated that “the experience is very gratifying and he looks forward to assisting the large and well–coordinated team of healthcare workers in a fast-paced environment.”

Grants


Type: QUERI Program Merit Review Award. Title: Dynamic Diffusion Network QUERI Program. Funded by: (2020–2025) QUERI, Dept. of Veterans Affairs. ($3,099,454).

PI: Dr. Lad S., MIRECC 2nd year postdoctoral fellow, Salisbury site.

Type: Early Career Psychologist Professional Development Grant. Title: Adapting to Military Diversity: The need to update Clinical Neuropsychology Norms. Funded by: Military Psychology, Division 19. ($1,250.00).

Education and Dissemination

Transitions

Dr. Cindy Swinkels has been named the new Clinical Core Co-Director to continue to advance the mission of translating postdeployment mental health through clinical training, consultative, evaluative, and implementation efforts. Dr. Swinkels is highly engaged with both VA Central Office and the Department of Defense and brings a wealth of knowledge and awareness of national priorities to the MiRECC. As an expert in behavioral sleep medicine and other clinical repertoires, she embodies the true spirit of the MiRECC.

National Services

Dr. Holly Miskey (MIRECC Fellowship Co-Director, Salisbury site), was invited to join The International Neuropsychological Society’s Education Committee. The committee is responsible for the content of continuing education opportunities, developing the online Oral History Archive project which includes interviews with leaders in our field and developing other educational resources for its membership.

Honors & Awards

Dr. Robin Hurley, MIRECC Associate Director of Education, was honored on December 3rd by the Wake Forest School of Medicine (WFSM) with the 2020 Special Achievement Award for her many years of work to establish and grow research and educational relationships between the Salisbury VAMC and WFSM. The VISN 6 MiRECC was the first and longest standing research relationship between the two entities. This successful partnership has led the two institutions to many years of growth in collaborative research in multiple disciplines, education of the next generation of medical providers in over 23 medical subspecialties, and to improved clinical care for the Salisbury VAMC Veterans. Congratulations to Dr. Hurley and her team.

Invited Lectures

Drs. Bryan, B. (previous MIRECC Fellow, and current Director of the Salisbury Psychology Internship and Psychology Residency, PTSD Program Director), and Hurley, R.A. (MIRECC Associate Director of Education), presented an invited lecture to Neuro Community Care, LLC for continuing education credits on February 16 on the topic “Windows to the Brain: Understanding PTSD in times of COVID-19.” (virtual)
Invited Lectures (Cont.)

Dr. López-Ojeda, W. (MIRECC Asst. Director of Education) offered a lecture presentation in January 25 for 3rd & 4th year Osteopathic and Allopathic medical students and other graduate interprofessional health trainees. His lecture was entitled “Neuroanatomical Perspectives on the Cranial Nerve Zero (CN0): A Multidisciplinary Educational Approach.” (virtual)

Dr. Naylor, J. (MIRECC Deputy Director), presented an invited lecture to the Grand Rounds at Duke University for continuing education credits on December 17 on the topic “Biomarkers and New Therapeutics for Pain: A Novel Neurosteroid Intervention.” (virtual)

Invited Presentations


Poster Presentations


Reinhardt, AA., Naylor JC., Kilts, JD., Shampine, LJ., Parke, GJ., VA Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Workgroup, Jain, S., Grant, G., Lang, AJ., Stein, MB., Marx, CE. (2021). Neurosteroids and Inflammatory Markers. 11th International Meeting on Steroids and Nervous System and the associate Satellite Symposium. (virtual)


Publications


Ord, AS., Shura, RD., Curtiss, G., Armistead-Jehle, P., Vanderploeg, R., Bowles, A., Kennedy, JE., Tate, DF., Cooper, DB. (2020). Number of Concussions Does Not Affect Treatment Response to Cognitive Rehabilitation Interventions Following Mild TBI in Military Service Members. Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology. (Read more)

Visit Self-help resources to obtain education and support information for Veterans, friends and family members who may be facing mental health challenges. VA specialists have assembled a short list of reviewer’s recommended materials that may be helpful in finding the most appropriate information for you. We have a new education pamphlet on Moral Injury (MI), click here.

Please click on each resource topic for more information.

- General Mental Health
- Depression & Anxiety
- PTSD
- Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

For additional help, click "How to Use."

ONLINE LIFE TRAINING SKILLS 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. For more information, click here.

VA Providers: Take courses using TMS links
Non-VA Providers: Use TRAIN links

Course 1: Driving and Demential-Hanging up the Keys.
Course 2: How to Deliver the Diagnosis of Alzheimer’s Disease.
Course 3: How to Have an End of Life Discussion.
Course 4: How to Identify Self-Neglect.
Course 5: Addressing Decision Making and Safety in Dementia.

VISIT PACERS for links to each course.

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

The DMVA 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 2020 edition is now available. View or Download by clicking here.

UPCOMING WEBINARS FOR NATIONAL CBOC MENTAL HEALTH GRAND ROUNDS

March 10 & 11
Using An All-Encompassing Approach to Treat Affective Disorders (9am-10am EST).

April 14 & 15:
Ethics of Responding to Hate Speech and Microaggressions (9-10am EST).

May 12 & 13:
Treating Substance Use Disorder and the National Telemental Health SUD Consultation Service (9am-10am EST).

Check the website for previous webinars in this series available for credit in TMS.

For direct links to webinars, click here.
To develop, disseminate and apply scientific knowledge and best practices to enhance post-deployment mental health and wellness for our Nation’s Veterans and their families.

Stay Up to Date on Mid-Atlantic MIRECC
Contact (leonard.deshield@va.gov) to ensure you’re on the mailing list to receive copies of our newsletter.

Next Issue: June 2021