Director's Update

Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 saw continued productivity and growth for the Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC. I am delighted to report that our ongoing scientific dissemination efforts produced 73 scientific and professional publications in FY 2022, including 53 published papers, 16 advance online publications and 1 book chapter.

We also promoted strategic development by growing our portfolio of funded research, education, and clinical demonstration projects. Specifically, MIRECC investigators obtained over $4M in grants in FY 2022, compared to $3.5M for FY 2021, a 12.5% increase. In addition, two of our MIRECC’s signature studies -- the Post-Deployment Mental Health Longitudinal (PDMH-L) Study and the Post-Deployment Mental Health Data Repository -- resumed participant recruitment and data analysis safely within the evolving context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many thanks to the amazing team of MIRECC core directors, lab leaders, investigators, affiliates, and stakeholders who made 2022 a terrific year.

A warm welcome to Olga Khonyakina, LCSW. Olga received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from University of Texas at El Paso and her MSW from the University of Central Florida. She will be splitting her time between the PDMH-L study and a clinical trial. Prior to accepting this position with the MIRECC she worked at the UNC Johnston Health Hospital and Triangle Springs Hospital and has experience with both inpatient and outpatient populations. We are very excited to have Olga join us!

John A. Fairbank, PhD
Director, Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC
Anna Theresa Magnante, PsyD, is a first year Advanced MIRECC Psychology fellow at the Salisbury VA Medical Center. She received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Regent University. She completed her clinical internship on the neuropsychology track at the Central Virginia VA Healthcare System (Richmond VAMC) in 2022. Anna’s primary research interests include improving quality of life for Veterans with neurocognitive dysfunction. Her specific focus is on examining the relationship between physical health and psychological well-being. Furthermore, she is interested in exploring how these two factors may erode cognitive efficiency, and whether interventions can be developed to reduce their impact. She is excited to continue her work as a MIRECC fellow with the goal of enhancing clinical care through her research. In her free time, Anna enjoys bicycling, baking, playing piano, and spending time with her loved ones.

Victoria O’Connor, PhD, is a first year Advanced MIRECC Psychology fellow at the Salisbury VA Medical Center. She received her doctorate in health psychology from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and completed her clinical internship at the Salisbury VA in 2022. Her clinical interests focus on neuropsychological assessment of older Veterans with complex medical comorbidities. As a fellow, Victoria is pursuing further research training on trauma and related disorders, such as PTSD, that may impact cognitive performance. Her research to date has focused on the role of cognition in the development, maintenance, and recovery from PTSD. She is excited to continue this work as a MIRECC fellow with the goal of improving mental health services and care for Veterans. In her free time, she enjoys spending as much time outdoors as possible.

### EDUCATION AND DISSEMINATION

#### Poster Presentations


#### Invited Presentations

**Martindale, S. L., & Rowland, J. A. (September, 2022).** Effects of Blast Severity on Symptom Presentation and Cognitive Performance. Oral presentation at the Military Health System Research Symposium, Kissimmee, FL.


**McDonald, S. D. & Vriesman, M. (August, 2022).** The atheistic experience: How to be a competent therapist for the questioning and non-believer. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Annual Convention, Minneapolis, MN.

### Conference Participation/Research Presentations

**McDonald, S.D.** Planning Committee for the 2023 Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals Conference and Expo.


**Parker, R., & Smigelsky, M. (July 12, 2022).** Trauma part 2: Moral injury. Presented at the VA Clinical Pastoral Education Enrichment Series. (Virtual).


Scientific Articles:


**RESOURCES FOR VETERANS & FAMILIES**

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."

**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. View or Download by clicking [here](#).

**PROVIDER EDUCATION**

PACERS is an education program for health care staff who care for Veterans with cognitive disorders and their caregivers. While this program targets rural health care staff, providers working in any setting can benefit from this information.

**VA Providers:** Take courses using TMS links

**Non-VA Providers:** Use TRAIN links

**Course 1:** Driving and Dementia-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.
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BRIEFINGS
Stay Up to Date on Mid-Atlantic MIRECC
Contact (Nancy.martino@va.gov) to ensure you’re on the mailing list to receive copies of our newsletter.

Next Issue: WINTER 2022