

BRIEFINGS

The latest news and updates from the Mid-Atlantic MIRECC



Director's Update



I am delighted to announce that Patrick Calhoun, PhD is the new Deputy Director of the VISN 6 MIRECC. Since 2006, Dr. Calhoun has directed the MIRECC Health Services Research Laboratory and is the Director of Psychology Fellowship Training for two interdisciplinary fellowship programs at the Durham VAHCS. Dr. Calhoun is a Health Services researcher with expertise in the psychological, behavioral and health consequences of traumatic stress as well as the provision of cognitive-behavioral interventions for substance misuse.

For the past decade, much of his work has focused on reducing the morbidity and mortality associated with substance misuse among at risk populations including those with PTSD. He also has a long history of mentoring undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and junior faculty. Welcome, Dr. Calhoun, to the Deputy Director Role.

Aligning with Dr. Calhoun's commitment to supporting VA investigators, we are extremely pleased to announce an RFA for FY24 VISN 6 MIRECC Rapid Pilot Awards. The purpose of these pilot awards is to invest in preliminary projects that are aligned with VISN 6 MIRECC goals and have strong potential to lead to future funding (Career Development Awards, Merit Awards, NIH funding, etc). Specific areas of interest include research focused on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), substance use disorders (SUD), chronic pain, destructive behaviors (suicide and violence) and the impact of environmental exposures on mental and physical health. Selected projects will be funded up to \$15,000.

VISN 6 MIRECC Rapid Pilot Awards have historically supported several early- and mid-career investigators who have gone on to successfully develop their own independently funded research laboratories. For example, Dr. Kirsten Dillon successfully competed for VISN 6 MIRECC Pilot Award funding during her MIRT fellowship and used that preliminary data to successfully compete for a VA Career Development Award. I am very pleased to share that Dr. Dillon has since received her first Merit Review Award as an independent investigator which begins February, 2024. A huge and well-earned congratulations, Dr. Dillon!

For more information about the FY24 VISN 6 MIRECC Rapid Pilot Awards, please reach out to Patrick.Calhoun2@va.gov.

Jennifer C. Naylor, PhD

Director, Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC

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FOCUS ON THE VISN



NEWS



HONORS, GRANTS AND AWARDS

★ **Drs. Caitlin Fountain, PhD**, First-year MIRECC fellow and Neuroscientist, Central Virginia Health Care System, and **James M. Bjork, PhD**, Associate Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University, Institute for Drugs and Alcohol Studies, received IRB approval to begin collecting data for the Deployment Experiences: Relationships with Cognition and Decision-Making study. This study, sponsored by the Jesse Family Foundation, focuses on how deployment or having a brain injury when deployed affects veteran decision-making and other mental abilities. It will also examine the effects of music listening on veteran cognition and well-being. Recruitment at the Richmond VA begins in early 2024.

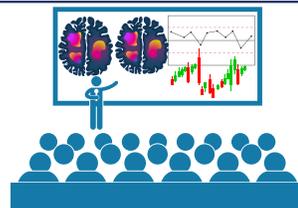
★ **Dr. Nate Kimbrel, PhD**, Associate Professor & Clinical Investigator, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Duke University School of Medicine, and Durham VAHCS, received a well-earned Research Career Scientist Award from the VA’s Office of Research and Development’s (ORD) Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development (BLRD) Service. This is one of ORD’s highest awards to be conferred to an investigator. Dr. Kimbrel’s research career has been focused on Veteran suicide prevention. His contributions to the field have been numerous and impactful. Together with VISN 6 MIRECC Genetics Lab, recently conducted the largest genetic and DNA methylation studies of suicidal thoughts and behaviors to date. This collaboration has resulted in the discovery of 16 genes and 3 DNA methylation markers associated with increased risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors. These findings support future targeted investigations of the biology of suicide. Dr. Kimbrel and his team are currently conducting the largest genome-wide gene X environment study of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, which will significantly enhance and expand the current understanding of how the interplay between genomics and environmental risk factors may lead to increased risk of suicide.

★ **Dr. Robert Shura, PhD**, Salisbury site PI and Director of VISN 6 MIRECC Neurocognition Laboratory was awarded \$474,000 for the project entitled: Multisensory Dysfunction (MSD) Phenotypes as Predictors of Cognitive Impairment and Trajectory after Traumatic Brain Injury. The primary aim of this two-site CDMRP study is to assess if MSD phenotypes are predictive of cognitive performance longitudinally, studying cognitive trajectory over time.



RESEARCH EDUCATION AND DISSEMINATION

Presentations



- López-Ojeda, W.** (November 16, 2023). The Medical Metaverse: Extended Reality (XR) and Other Technologies for clinical care, medical education, and training. Mental Health Grand Rounds. (Virtual Presentation).
- Smigelsky, M.** (October 24, 2023). Understanding Moral Injury: Considerations for Conceptualization and Care, Ann Arbor VA Health Care System. Mental Health Grand Rounds. (Virtual presentation).
- Smigelsky, M.** (November 16, 2023). Moral Injury and Women Veterans. Chaplain Women Veterans Group. (Virtual presentation).

Book Chapters:

Wortmann, J., Nieuwsma, J.A., & Meador, K.G. (in press). Integrative spiritual care for mental health concerns: Lessons from an intensive chaplaincy training program. In C. Cook (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Spirituality, Religion, and Medical Humanities*. Oxford: Routledge Press.

Scientific Articles:

Bhatt-Mackin, Seamus M., Smigelsky, M. (2023). Emerging Interventions for Moral Injury: Expanding Pathways to Moral Healing. *Current Treatment Options in Psychiatry*. <http://doi:10.1007/s40501-023-00303-8>

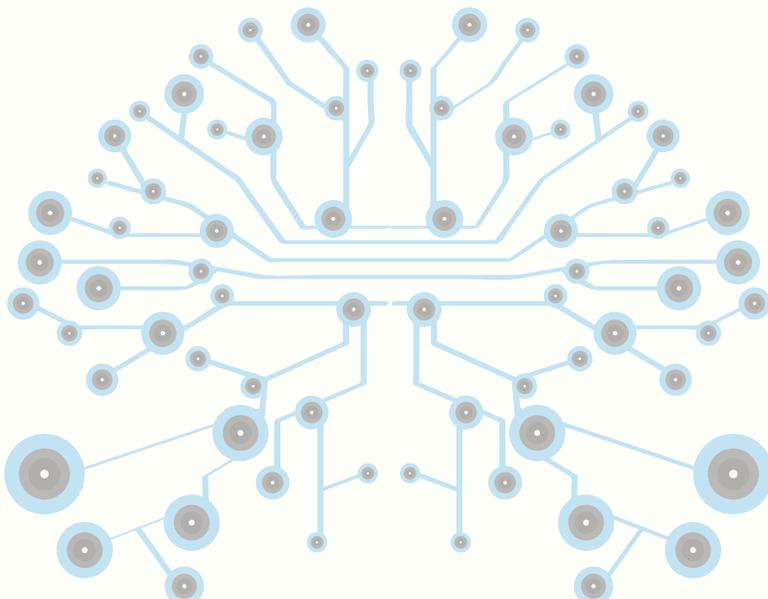
Magnante, A. T., Ord, A. S., Kuschel, S., & Shura, R. D. (in press). An evaluation of the relationship between objective and subjective measures of attention. *Psychology and Neuroscience*.

Shura, R. D., Sapp, A., Ingram, P. B., & Brearly, T. W. (in press). Evaluation of telehealth administration of MMPI symptom validity scales. *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*.

Shura, R. D. & Armistead-Jehle, P. (2023). Base rates of performance and symptom validity test failures in active duty and veteran samples referred for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder evaluation. *Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/arclin/acad092>

Tao, H., Nieuwsma, J.A., Meador, K.G., Harris, S.L., & Robinson, P.S. (2024). Validation of the moral injury outcome scale in acute care nurses. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1279255>

Varela, J., Magnante, A., Miskey, H., Ord, A. S., Eldridge, A., & Shura, R. (in press). A systematic review of the utility of Continuous Performance Tests among adults with ADHD. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*.



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.

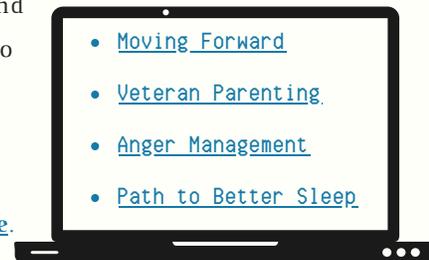
Please click on each resource topic for more information.

- [General Mental Health](#)
- [Depression & Anxiety](#)
- [PTSD](#)
- [Substance Use Disorder \(SUD\)](#)

For additional help, click "[How to Use.](#)"



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](#).



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](#).



UPCOMING WEBINARS FOR NATIONAL CBOC MENTAL HEALTH GRAND ROUNDS (GRs) and OTHER PRESENTATIONS
Check the website for previous and upcoming webinars in this series available for credit in TMS.
For direct registration links, click [here](#).



For previous GRs recordings click [here](#).

MIRECC PRESENTS WEBINARS

(Join sessions via the Adobe Connect app): Register through VA TMS EEA then attend LIVE at <http://va-eerc-ees.adobeconnect.com/mireccpresents/>



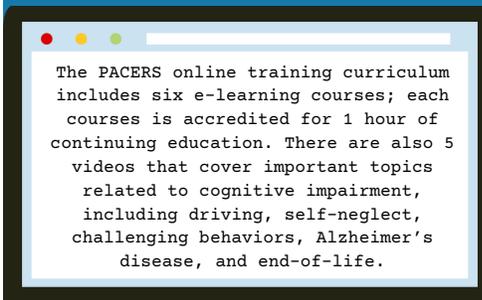
1st and 3rd Wednesdays from October to June, 12 to 1pm (PT)

Access the MIRECC Presents webinar series calendar for upcoming events online at <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/vsn20/Education/webinars-mirecc-presents.asp>

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.



The PACERS online training curriculum includes six e-learning courses; each course is accredited for 1 hour of continuing education. There are also 5 videos that cover important topics related to cognitive impairment, including driving, self-neglect, challenging behaviors, Alzheimer's disease, and end-of-life.

- 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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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

BRIEFINGS

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Next Issue: SPRING 2024