



A monthly newsletter dedicated to informing and strengthening the VA Research Community - November 2021

Message from the CRADO

Dear VA Research Community,

We are bound together as a community through our shared mission to improve Veterans lives through research. By working in partnership with clinical offices, we can accomplish our mission more efficiently and effectively. Today, I'd like to tell you about a great example of research-clinical partnership: the [Lung Precision Oncology Program](#) (LPOP). LPOP is part of VHA's Precision Oncology Initiative, which strives to transform VA into a system of excellence for cancer care.



Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Nearly 230,000 people are diagnosed annually. It is also the deadliest cancer affecting VA patients. Nearly 8,000 Veterans are treated in VA for lung cancer each year. Around 900,000 Veterans are at risk for lung cancer due to age, environmental exposures during and after military service, and smoking.

The majority of people—including Veterans—with lung cancer are diagnosed in late stages, when the prognosis can be grim. Lung cancer screening through low-dose CT scanning is an evidence-based way to detect lung cancer early, when it can be more readily treated. In addition, genetic testing of the lung cancer tumors can identify therapeutic avenues that provide hope even in more advanced cases of lung cancer.

As a system of excellence, LPOP aims to prevent lung cancer, identify it earlier, and provide the right treatment to every Veteran seen in VA, no matter where they live. All world-class cancer care centers provide patients with access to clinical trials, so one of LPOP's goals is to increase the number of trials available to Veterans across our system. These trials include identifying what existing treatments work best for different subtypes of lung cancer, in addition to testing novel treatments. A great example of LPOP bringing high-impact clinical trials to Veterans is the [VALOR](#) (VA Lung Cancer and Stereotactic Radiotherapy) trial. This phase-three clinical trial is investigating the role of high-precision radiation therapy as an alternative to surgery for early-stage lung cancer.



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With such big goals, LPOP itself must be big. It currently includes 20 “hub sites” across VISNs that coordinate with local “spoke” VA facilities for cancer screening, genetic testing, and clinical trial participation. Over 70 VA medical centers are involved so far!

LPOP shows what we can accomplish as a community. In addition to the many VA sites across the country, LPOP involves partnerships with VHA’s National Oncology Office; the VA national program offices for Lung Cancer Screening, Radiology, Pulmonology, and Veteran Experience; the National Cancer Institute, the Department of Defense, and other organizations and university affiliates. By working with these other organizations, we can put Veteran data to work to reach real-world clinical results. In building out LPOP, we have been fortunate to have our Cooperative Studies Program’s (CSP) expertise and experience. The West Haven CSP team, led by Dr. Tassos Kyriakides, has been doing a marvelous job coordinating the entire effort.

There are so many others who have made LPOP possible that I could fill pages touting each of their unique contributions. With that said, I would be terribly remiss if I did not also recognize the contributions of Dr. Kenute Myrie, who is the senior program manager for precision oncology in the Office of Research and Development; Mr. Shawn Berrien, who currently is my special assistant; Dr. Michael Kelley, who leads the National Oncology Program Office; and Mr. Marvin Rydberg, who currently is a deputy director in the Office of Healthcare Transformation.

I am proud to work at VA, where we have the resources and people to accomplish such great things in service of such a worthy mission. Many thanks to each of you for bringing your unique gifts and skills to our work.

With gratitude,

Rachel

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD
Chief Research and Development Officer (14RD)
Department of Veterans Affairs



Policy/Admin Updates

Guidance for accessing MVP data—MVP data will be available for ALL ELIGIBLE VA investigators for Merit projects beginning in the spring 2022 cycle for BLR&D and CSR&D and the summer 2022 cycle for HSR&D and RR&D.

MVP has created a new guidance document outlining how VA investigators can apply for Merit Awards that include access to MVP data across the four ORD research services. Applicants interested in the opportunity to access MVP data for Merit projects should register for an account in the Genomic Information System for Integrative Sciences

([GENESIS](#)) research environment, where they can view aggregate data from the MVP cohort to help prepare their letters of intent and full applications.

Career development applicants for all four services can apply for MVP data, but are subject to separate guidance. Documentation and guidance can be found on the [RFA and Program Announcements](#) intranet page.



Resources and Opportunities

Post-COVID-19 research funding opportunity—A new [program announcement](#) provides an upcoming cross-service opportunity for research funding on post-COVID-19 conditions. The announcement provides an initial overview of the program to help interested investigators begin collaborative and preparatory discussions in advance of an expected November RFA. More information will be forthcoming.

Data Monitoring Committee members needed—CSR&D's Centralized Data Monitoring Committee (DMC) is currently seeking members for two panels—Medical/Surgical and Psychiatric, Behavioral Health and Neurologic Disorders. The DMC is an independent multidisciplinary group that provides ongoing oversight and monitoring of funded studies focusing on safety and feasibility, participant accrual and retention, adverse events monitoring, and data analysis. Qualifications for membership include funding history and clinical trial experience, academic position of associate professor or above, a solid publications record, and review experience. Members are needed from the following areas: cardiology, pulmonology, oncology, urology, neurology, internal medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation, and biostatistics. For more information, please contact Dr. Tamara Paine (tamara.paine@va.gov).

Coordinator Webinar Workgroup looking for collaboration opportunities—The "Coordinator Webinar Workgroup" is a VA group under development that aims to provide educational/training resources to all study coordinators in the field. The intended audience for the educational material provided by the workgroup may include national study coordinators affiliated with the VA Research Group and VA National Coordinators groups. The workgroup is interested in connecting with other similar groups in the field to coordinate and minimize duplication of effort. If you know of or are a member of such a group, please contact Dr. Paska Permana (paska.permana@va.gov) to discuss collaboration.

Research in Action call for submissions—All VA research is intended to ultimately contribute to the health and well-being of Veterans. VA [Research in Action](#) highlights examples of how VA research has been translated into everyday health care within VHA or in medical care generally.

We are looking for VA projects to highlight that have had substantial, lasting impact on health care across the country and globe. If you know of a VA accomplishment that you think would be a good candidate for this feature, please contact Tristan.horrom@va.gov with details.



Ethics Fundamentals session on informed consent—Ethics Fundamentals is a series of monthly online health care ethics education sessions for ethics consultants and other who will participate in the VA ethics program. The intent of the 10-module course is to increase health care ethics knowledge and skills to better serve Veterans. The next session will be held at 12 pm ET on Nov. 15, 2021, via [WebEx](#). This session will focus on informed consent as an ethical and legal principle.

High-performance computing request for project concepts—ORD is soliciting concept ideas to address clinical care gaps where high-performance computing (HPC), artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning (ML) can be implemented to improve medical knowledge and applied to care at VA.

A limited number of novel concepts will be selected through a joint VA-DOE peer-review panel to partner with Department of Energy (DOE) scientists and work on developing a full two-year project plan. The projects will be conducted at DOE's Oak Ridge National Laboratory, where copies of the VA Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW) data and Million Veteran Program genetic data are housed. Funding will be provided for two-year projects resulting from selected concept ideas. The application deadline is Dec. 15, 2021. Questions about the RFA should be sent to MVPLOI@va.gov.

Employment

- (11/01/21) [Health Science Research Specialist/Coordinator for VA-DOD Study](#)- Seattle, WA
- (11/01/21) [Open Rank Faculty Positions in the Department of Implementation Science](#)- Winston-Salem, NC
- (10/28/21) [Health Sciences Research Coordinator, EPIC³Study](#) - Seattle, WA
- (10/27/21) [Research Database Manager](#)- Atlanta, GA
- (10/21/21) [Research Assistant/Research Coordinator](#)- Seattle, WA
- (10/21/21) [Research Assistant \(SHADE Study, CSP #595\)](#)- Seattle, WA
- (10/21/21) [Research Project Manager](#)- East Orange, NJ
- (10/15/21) [Early to Mid-Career Clinician Investigator in General Internal Medicine](#)- Portland, OR
- (10/14/21) [National Program Coordinator – MVP Recruitment and Enrollment](#)- Boston, MA

- (10/14/21) [Deputy Director - Million Veteran Program](#)- Boston, MA
- (10/12/21) [Health Science Officer \(GS-13\)](#)- Los Angeles, CA

More VA Research opportunities can be seen on the [ORD website](#). Members of the VA Research community who are interested in advertising their available positions here can submit requests to ORD.Web@va.gov.



Noteworthy Publications

Below is a small sampling of noteworthy studies published by VA researchers within the past month. This list is intended to reflect the broad spectrum of VA research, but is in no way inclusive of all VA researcher topics or projects. Visit the [VACO Library](#) website to sign up for alerts on published VA studies on many different topics.

[Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation for COVID-19: Evolving outcomes from the international Extracorporeal Life Support Organization Registry](#). Barbaro RP, MacLaren G, Boonstra PS, Combes A, Agerstrand C, Annich G, Diaz R et al. Mortality after extracorporeal membrane oxygenation for patients with COVID-19 worsened during 2020. *Lancet*. 2021 Oct 2;398(10307):1230-1238.

[Hominini-specific regulation of CBLN2 increases prefrontal spinogenesis](#). Shibata M, Pattabiraman K, Muchnik SK, Kaur N, Morozov YM, Cheng X, Waxman SG, Sestan N. Findings suggest a genetic and molecular basis for the anterior-posterior cortical gradient and disproportionate increase in hominini prefrontal cortex of dendritic spines and a developmental mechanism that may link to neuropsychiatric disorders. *Nature*. 2021 Oct;598(7881):489-494.

[Adding a new medication versus maximizing dose to intensify hypertension treatment in older adults: A retrospective observational study](#). Aubert CE, Sussman JB, Hofer TP, Cushman WC, Ha JK, Min L. Adding a new antihypertensive medication was less frequent and was associated with less intensification sustainability but slightly larger reductions in systolic blood pressure. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2021 Oct 5. Online ahead of print.

[Comparative cellular analysis of motor cortex in human, marmoset and mouse](#). Bakken TE, Jorstad NL, Hu Q, Lake BB, Tian W, Kalmbach BE, Crow M et al. Findings highlight the robust molecular underpinnings of cell-type diversity in primary motor cortex across mammals, and point to the genes and regulatory pathways responsible for the functional identity of cell types and their specific-species adaptations. *Nature*. 2021 Oct;598(7879):111-119.

[Mortality among persons entering HIV care compared with the general U.S. population: An observational study](#). Edwards JK, Cole SR, Breger TL, Rudolph JE, Filiatreau LM, Buchacz K et al. Mortality among persons entering HIV care decreased dramatically between 1999 and 2017, although those entering care remained at modestly higher risk for death in the years after starting care than comparable persons in the general U.S. population. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2021 Sep;174(9):1197-1206.

[Prognostic value of polygenic risk scores for adults with psychosis](#). Landi I, Kaji DA, Cotter L, Van Vleck T, Belbin G, Preuss M, Loos RJ et al. The schizophrenia polygenic risk score did not improve the performance of predictive models. *Nature Medicine*. 2021 Sep;27(9):576-1581.

[The dynamic, combinatorial cis-regulatory lexicon of epidermal differentiation](#). Kim DS, Risca VI, Reynolds DL, Chappell J, Rubin AJ, Jung N, Donohue LK et al. This integrative approach shows the combinatorial cis-regulatory lexicon of epidermal differentiation. *Nature Genetics*. 2021 Nov;53(11):1564-1576.

[Identifying equitable screening mammography strategies for black women in the United States using simulation modeling](#). Chapman CH, Schechter CB, Cadham CJ, Trentham-Dietz A, Gangnon RE, Jagsi R, Mandelblatt JS. Initiating biennial screening in Black women at age 40 reduces breast cancer mortality disparities and yields benefit-harm ratios that are similar to tradeoffs of white women screened from ages 50 to 74. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2021 Oct 19. Online ahead of print.

[Federated learning for predicting clinical outcomes in patients with COVID-19](#). Dayan I, Roth HR, Zhong A, Harouni A, Gentili A, Abidin AZ, Liu A et al. Federated learning facilitated rapid data science collaboration without data exchange and generated a model that generalized across heterogeneous, unharmonized datasets for prediction of clinical outcomes in patients with COVID-19. *Nature Medicine*. 2021 Oct;27(10):1735-1743.



Media Buzz

Social Media Highlights

On Oct. 2, the main VA Twitter account tweeted to its over 600,000 followers a story about VA Research's efforts to support diversity through early career research awards.



Veterans Affairs ✓
@DeptVetAffairs



Diversity in VA research: VA supports early career investigators from minority backgrounds through new research awards.



blogs.va.gov

VA grants first diversity, equity, inclusion research awards - Vantage Point
Diversity in VA research: VA supports early career investigators from minority backgrounds through new research awards.

2:30 PM · Oct 2, 2021 · Salesforce - Social Studio

If you would like to submit a post to go on the VA Research Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram pages, please do so via email at ORDMedia@va.gov.

Please include the following information:

- Desired platform: Facebook, Twitter (240 character max), or Instagram
- Post content
- Image
- Link

After the above are submitted, the request will be forwarded to the ORD Communications team for approval and scheduling. Posts may also be added to a library of potential stories to be picked up by other VA social media accounts, such as the main VA pages.

VA Research in the News

On Nov. 3, "[For vaccine-hesitant Veterans, side effects a top concern](#)" from *U.S. News & World Report* reported on a study of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among Veterans. Out of more than 1,170 VA health care patients surveyed, 71% had received at least one vaccine shot. Of those unvaccinated, fear of potential side effects and concern about the "newness" of the vaccines were the primary reasons given for hesitancy. In the unvaccinated group, 40% said they did not plan to get a vaccine. Patients in poorer overall physical health were more likely to be hesitant about the vaccine, according to the study. The research suggests that more outreach is needed to inform Veterans of the benefits of getting vaccinated and to address their concerns, say the researchers.

Research Photo of the Month



Dr. Michael Lewis and team members at the VA Greater Los Angeles medical intensive care unit stand with the Seraph filter, a device being [tested](#) as a possible way of filtering COVID-19 viral particles from the blood. (Photo by Scott Hathaway)

Do you have photos of VA researchers in action or interesting science images from your lab? Share them with us! Send your photos to ORD *Field Update* editor Tristan Horrom at tristan.horrom@va.gov.



Upcoming Events

- The next ORD Monthly Field Call will be held on **Nov. 25, 2021**, at 1:30 EST on Microsoft Teams.
- The 2021 Federal Benefits Open Season begins **Nov. 8** and ends **Dec. 13, 2021**. Changes to employee benefit plans can be made through the [MyPay](#) website or with SF 2809 through the local human resources office.



Achievements and Milestones

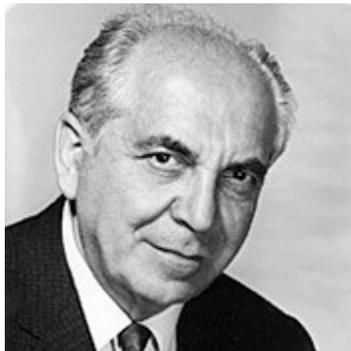
We are looking for VA researchers who served in the military to feature in a series called [VA Researchers Who Served](#). The profiles explain the critical work that VA researchers do for the Veteran community and at the same time highlight and recognize their military service.

If you know a VA researcher who would be a good candidate for this series, please contact Mike Richman (Michael.richman1@va.gov).

Career Milestones

VA researcher elected to National Academy of Medicine—VA researcher Dr. Bruce Ovbiagele was [elected](#) to the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) during its annual meeting on Oct. 18, 2021. Election to the academy is considered one of the highest honors in health and medicine. This honor recognizes outstanding professional achievement and commitment to service. Ovbiagele is associate dean and chief of staff at the San Francisco VA Health Care System. His research focuses on the health of vulnerable populations with or at risk for stroke.

History Corner



Cancer research trailblazer—Dr. Ludwig Gross, a Polish-born scientist who served in the U.S. Army in World War II and became chief of cancer research at the Bronx VA Medical Center in 1946, was considered a trailblazer. He was among the first to show that cancer, particularly leukemia, could in some cases be caused by viruses. He received a prestigious Lasker Award in 1974 for pioneering the field of tumor virology, and authored a textbook, *Oncogenic Viruses*, that became a standard in the field. Gross himself succumbed to cancer in 1999, at the age of 94.

Anyone interested in receiving general news updates about VA research is invited to [sign up](#) for our VA Research Currents and VA Research Spotlight monthly emails.



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