



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Office of Research & Development

Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes Monday, August 16, 2021 at 1:30 pm ET

Internal Teams Site: [Click Here](#)

1. Welcome

Grant Huang, MPH, Ph.D.

Dr. Grant Huang welcomed attendees and highlighted the full agenda, many of which focused on enterprise efforts.

2. ORD / Research Enterprise

Grant Huang, MPH, Ph.D.

- NAVREF Annual Virtual Conference –
Aug 23-25, 2021

NAVREF will be holding its annual conference that includes ACOS-Rs and AOs in a virtual format this year. The in-person session in September was recently cancelled. The virtual portion will be on Aug 23-25 and ORD has purchased a limited number of licenses/seats for those who are unable to join through their respective VA affiliated non-profit corporation. ORD is currently working on managing the availabilities of these seats. However, requests can be made to Grant for any needs for a virtual seat at the conference.

- Centralized Research Services Contract update

Recently, ORD announced efforts to establish a centralized contract for research services with a particular emphasis on clinical studies. An initial orientation occurred on July 29, 2021 and workgroups have been formed to address key processes related to request/intake processes, deployment of services and budgeting for field access to using this support. More info will be provided as things develop, but those personnel in R&D offices helping with this effort are greatly appreciated.

- Searching for ORD funded studies

Charlie Festel has improved the capability for anyone to learn more about ORD funded studies. Abstracts are now included in the search making it more effective, and the results can be further filtered by Service. <https://www.research.va.gov/about/funded-projects.cfm>.

- ACOS-R Executive Training

Grant thanked the roughly 60 ACOS-Rs who provided feedback on a recent survey to help develop an executive-level training curriculum for ACOS-Rs. ORD will continue to provide updates on progress.

- **Research Enterprise Spotlight**

VA Women's Health Research Network

Susan M. Frayne, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Yano, Ph.D.

As part of efforts to provide professional development opportunities, a presentation was made by Susan Frayne and Elizabeth Yano on the VA Women's Health Research Network which has enhanced research on women Veterans for over 10 years..

VA Women's Health Research Network has had great impacts on women Veterans' research by addressing methods and producing findings on a range of topics. *For more information*, contact Elizabeth.Yano@va.gov and/or Susan.Frayne@va.gov

3. Research Protections & Policy

Molly Klote, M.D., CIP

- VAIRRS - CITI/TMS integration

The integration is projected to be complete by the end of August. Financial COI functionality to be turned on around Thanksgiving. Webinar and training are planned in the new FY.

- VAEDA (VA electronic Determination Aid)

8 sites are participating in the soft launch on Sept 8.

- CTMS

Sandbox evaluations are being completed. Thanks to all who participated and are writing up final evaluations. ORPPE is presently exploring hosting options, integration options with both CERNER and Vista.

- Proactive calling - Webinar Aug 24th

Recent approval from Dr. Stone will allow for an approval process through ORD for proactive/cold calling Veterans for time sensitive studies. Guidance, FAQs, and webinar on Tuesday August 24th at 3pm EST.

- Registry 2.0 - Focus groups

RBMC contracting group is helping conduct interviews. May be able to integrate with the new CTMS system. Initial focus will be on studies like prostate, lung and breast cancer, military exposures, PTSD and suicide.

4. Finance Updates

John M. Verwiell

Prior Year balances are at \$10.2M. Finance is working with Tony to cross-transfer and ensure PY funds are brought to \$0.

There has been a distribution of \$5M in unfunded requirements mainly on equipment including a recent need for electron microscope. An additional \$9M in American Rescue plan funds went out on Friday August 13th to support designated COVID-19 research on high priorities in conjunction with ORD enterprise-level efforts.

Efforts are focused on continuing to spend down and review Stations with large unobligated balances.

5. ORD Field Update newsletter

Mitchell Mirkin

The newsletter is part of a larger effort to build and strengthen VA Research as an enterprise. Will serve as single overarching publication from ORD to the field, as a repository of important information and resources. Will complement, not replace, specific emails from services or programs or groups within ORD.

It grew out of regular COVID updates started in 2020. The decision was to phase out that update and transition to a general update that would continue to contain COVID info but also contain info on other topics of timely interest.

The newsletter comes out second Tuesday of each month. Four issues sent so far (May – August).

Three specific requests:

1. All ACOSs and AOs should be receiving this publication directly. **Please verify.** Sender of this email appears as “Veterans Health” because it is sent through GovDelivery. Subject is “ORD Field Update.” Need to make sure this is not ending up in people’s Junk folders because it’s coming from an external source (GovDelivery).
2. If this has turned up in your Junk folder, please tell Outlook to start delivering these to your Inbox. Communications can provide instructions on how to do that.
3. If you are forwarding this email to investigators, do continue to do that, but also suggest to the investigators and research office staff that they sign up to receive this directly, so they don’t have to rely on having it forwarded. If you forward them the newsletter email, they will see a sign-up link at the bottom where they can sign up at GovDelivery to receive the publication directly.

More broadly, we ask for your support in making *ORD Field Update* a valued source of information on new funding opportunities, opportunities for collaboration, and other areas.

We welcome your feedback, input and participation, and hope this newsletter will effectively address your needs and reflect your interests.
Best contact: Tristan.Horrom@va.gov (editor).

6. Field IT updates

Carl Grunfeld

When the survey of software used by researchers is sent out, please encourage people to respond. This broadly distributed survey will determine what software the VA supports financially and will help prevent removal of software important for research.

If not been contacted as yet about EDUROAM and guest wireless, please e-mail me. Every effort will be made to add sites on to the pilots.

7. ORD Classification Initiatives Update & COVID-19 updates

Tony Laracuente

In the Spring, ORD recognized the need for standardized Position Descriptions in certain categories. A survey was completed that ranked critical positions that were often delayed by classification or that were highly utilized in hiring staff. Positions were ranked and came up with a list of top 5. Thanks to Jon Demorest, Brian Penz and Adam Mann from classification, a group of AOs began the arduous process of getting a nationally classified PD for a GS 12 Data Manager. Presently in the final stages of getting a PD completed that will have a nationally classified stamp.

What this means is that

1. This PD can be used by any site to hire a Data Manager at the GS 12 level without having to go through local classification
2. A statement of difference can be created to make this a GS 11 target 12
3. A local OF8 is not needed except for locally initiated SODs. The full performance level PD will include an OF-8 signed by senior program office management and certified in block 21 by HR CoE staff. The local supervisor at each facility will sign off on the approved OF-8 in the supervisory block.

This authorization is expected soon. A FAQ will be sent out on how to utilize the PD.

Currently effort will focus on a Research Coordinator, Biological Lab Tech (both animal and non-animal) and a lab manager PD.

It is expected that these efforts will cover about 60-70% of hires in research.

Thanks to the group of AOs that have and continue to work on this project including Sharon Jacky, Pamela Rice, Robert Crawford, Misty Seppi, Thelma Salazar.

Concerns were noted about classification and ORD stood up a pilot Research Classification Unit that is servicing VISN 22. This unit is classifying all research PDs in

that VISN. Hopefully, when successful it can be rolled out nationally. Mr. Laracuate expressed appreciation with the communication and the turnaround times that the team has provided. This very important step will hopefully lead the way to a national research HR unit.

Finally, the Secretary has sent guidance regarding vaccination. Any Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employee, volunteer, or contractor who works in VHA facilities, visits VHA facilities, or provides direct care to those we serve will need to be vaccinated. Each employee will have 8 weeks to be fully vaccinated and will need to provide proof of vaccination to their local VHA Occupational Health Office.

If you have questions regarding this mandate or want to provide ORD with information on the challenges you are facing implement the mandate, please send an email to the ORD COVID 19 mailbox ORDCOVID19@va.gov

8. Service Funding Opportunities, Reviews and Updates

- Cross services announcements / eRA updates Wendy Tenhula, Ph.D.
 - The NIH has announced a new eRA Commons login option. **All eRA Commons users will be required to switch to [Login.gov](https://login.gov) by September 15, 2021.** Please visit their web page [Two-Factor Authentication: Accessing eRA Modules via login.gov](#) for details.
 - Update: Notification of Upcoming Change in Federal-wide Unique Entity Identifier Requirements [NOT-OD-21-170](#)

- BLR&D Updates Christopher T. Bever, Jr., MD, MBA

Fall Review Round

RFAs have been posted. Completed applications are due in eRA by 9/8 (for a two day review period) or by 6pm on 9/10 with no review time. Questions can be directed to Dr. Mike Burgio, review manager, or the relevant portfolio manager.

Workshop on micro physiological systems

As part of the Congressionally mandated VA five-year plan to eliminate or reduce the use of sensitive animal species in VA research we are working with the National Center to Advance Translational Research on a workshop on using micro physiological systems to replace animal models. The workshop will focus on VA investigators who are currently using or are planning to use dogs, cats or non-human primates in their research and is tentatively planned for November, 2021. Contact Dr. Arun Sharma for details.

Field-Based Meetings

BLRD will again be soliciting applications for support of field-based planning meetings early in FY22. These meetings should bring together VA and other investigators working in related areas to develop roadmaps to focus research efforts on the achievement of translational goals.

Non-clinician eligibility

40% of 30 applications for non-clinician eligibility were recently approved. Letters have gone out to the field. Questions from stations can be directed to Dr. Alex Chiu.

Middleton Award Nominations

Nominating packets are now being accepted for next year's Middleton Award, BLRD Service's highest honor. The deadline for receipt of packets is 2/1/22. Questions can be directed to Dr. Kimberlee Potter.

Career Development Workshop

The combined BLRD and CSRD CDA workshop for first and third year awardees will be held virtually on September 13, 14 and 15. Questions can be directed to Dr. Mark Roltsch.

- CSR&D Updates

Terri Gleason, Ph.D.

Barnwell Award

CSR&D Announces 2021 Barnwell Awardee: Dr. Louis Dell'Italia. The John B. Barnwell Award (Barnwell Award) is the Clinical Science Research and Development Service's highest honor for outstanding achievement in clinical research that advances the diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment of diseases and disorders in the Veteran population.

CSR&D is proud to announce the 2021 Barnwell Award winner is Dr. Louis J. Dell'Italia from the Birmingham VA. Dr. Dell'Italia's scientific leadership and his commitment to improving health care for Veterans are clearly reflected in his outcomes based clinical trials that have changed clinical practice for millions of patients. His dedication and service to the VA is apparent by his role of Associate Chief of Staff for Research for over 12 years. He has seven top 10 Teaching Excellence Awards in the Departments of Medicine of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) and for the UAB Dean's Mentorship Award. Dr. Dell'Italia is a dedicated VA physician scientist with over 32 years' of service. Dr. Dell'Italia began his VA career as a physician in San Antonio. In 1989 he joined the staff of Birmingham VAMC. His research contributions to clinical science has been focused in three areas: right ventricle, mitral regurgitation and the renin angiotensin chymase system. In each area he has pursued novel approaches that has had significant clinical impact.

Dr. Dell'Italia wrote a Viewpoint in *Circulation Research* entitled the "Impact of VA Research on Health Care for All: Contributions over Nine Decades and Counting" (Circ Res 121(1):16-18, 2017).

Dr. Dell'Italia brings honor to the John B. Barnwell Award. He is an exemplary clinician scientist whose career and scientific contributions embody both the letter and the spirit of the award.

Just a reminder: the 2022 Applications are due COB February 1, 2022, for outstanding VA clinical scientists.

Nominations may come for the VA medical center or CSR&D can invite researchers to submit an application. **All applicants must apply through their local R&D Office.** To be eligible for the Barnwell Award, nominees must meet specific qualifications please review the program guide and instructions posted on the website for further details or contact Dr. Mark Roltsch if you have questions: mark.roltsch@va.gov

The information is found on the ORD website, just search Barnwell Award.

The website is https://www.research.va.gov/services/csrd/research-awards.cfm?_ga=2.56572011.1990953416.1542631466-377307463.1536175624#barnwell

BLRD and CSR&D Career Development Symposium:

2021 Career Development Awardee Symposium will be held on Monday, September 13 through Wednesday, September 15. The meeting will be virtual again this year and includes all BL and CS first and third year awardees. Thank you to these individuals, their mentors and their respective research facilities for supporting them during this award which allows protected research time.

Monday and Tuesday will consist of 4-5 hours of programming beginning at 11 am Eastern / 8 am Pacific and concluding with a virtual networking/social hour. Wednesday will be limited to meetings between BL/CS Scientific Portfolio Managers and the CDA awardees doing work in their topic areas (one meeting per portfolio).

Questions should be directed to mark.roltsch@va.gov

- HSR&D & QUERI Updates

Naomi Tomoyasu, Ph.D.

Award

2020 HSR&D Under Secretary's Award: Congratulations to Dr. Donna Washington, who is the recipient of the 2020 USH Award. We are very pleased to announce the award that comes as a mark of Dr Washington's substantial contributions to improving the quality of

VA healthcare. She has made a significant mark in her role as a mentor and been an inspiration to new researchers. The award will be presented to Dr. Washington by the Acting Under Secretary for Health at a future date and time that are still being worked out.

Congratulations to the other nominees as well for their distinguished careers and extensive contributions to health services research.

Emergency Medicine SOTA

We are proceeding with plans for a Virtual SOTA spread of several weeks in January/February 2022 on Emergency Medicine. Three WGs are addressing issues in; 1) Emergency MH care; 2) Emergency Care of Older Patients; and 3) Coordination of care with VA/Community emergency care.

Academy Health

HSR&D added some support to AH to help coordinate two expert meetings/white papers to develop research agendas: 1) provider burnout and 2) innovative payment models (working with VA Center for Practice and Payment Innovation. *Interested parties should reach out to David Atkins for #1 and Naomi Tomoyasu for #2.*

VAEDA evaluation

QUERI will be evaluating the ORD national VA Electronic Data assessment (VAEDA) tool pilot implementation at five VA sites.

EHRM & Research Updates

VA will pause EHR deployments through at least 2021. See hyperlink below.

<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/veterans-affairs/2021/07/va-will-pause-ehr-deployments-through-at-least-2021-department-says/>

CIDER Updates

ESP Reports:

- Management Brief: [COVID-19 Post-acute Care Major Organ Damage: A Living Rapid Review \(June 2021 Update\)](#)
- Evidence Brief: [Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy for Traumatic Brain Injury and/or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder](#)
- [Mental health outcomes of adults hospitalized for COVID-19: A living rapid review](#)

SMRB Updates - Summer 2021 Cycle

- On May 23, 2021, HSR&D revised all the posted Summer 2021 RFAs to reflect the new HSR&D policy on non-VA Co-investigators. Non-VA investigators who have an MD/PhD equivalent are eligible to serve in the role of Co-investigator, but they

cannot be listed as such on the budget forms. Additional details are in the posted RFAs.

- The HSR&D Intent-to-Submit in ART closed on May 7, 2021.
- 209 ITS were received for HSR&D.
- The last day to submit full applications (using Grants.gov Workspace or eRA ASSIST) was June 10, 2021.
- We received 29 CDAs, 28 Pilots, and 113 IIRs, for a total of 170 applications.
- *HSR&D's Scientific Merit Review Board and Career Development Award review meetings are both scheduled to take place virtually August 24 - 27, 2021.*

For questions regarding the review process, please contact Scientific Merit Review Program staff at vhacoscirev@va.gov

Other Updates

- Internal staffing shortages, realignment of duties, and an unprecedented volume of PMRs for processing due to ORD special solicitations involving COVID-19 and redistribution/pullback of FY21 funds in aggregate contributed to delays.

We are working diligently with ORD Finance to process the remaining PMRs and anticipate having them completed by the end of next week (August 20, 2021). Approval notifications with pink sheets (as applicable) will be distributed to the field on a rolling basis as they become available.

In order to minimize disruptions to ORD Finance work associated with processing the PMRs and keep them moving forward we ask that you please follow the guidance below.

- Do not email ORD Finance personnel directly with inquiries about PMRs.
- Inquire with your local Fiscal Office and/or Research Administration Office about funds received or pulled back in association with specific PMRs.
- Verify extensions of project end dates in ART or eRA.
- Submit questions on the status of PMRs directly to the mailbox VHA CO HSR&D Project Modifications c/o vhacohsrdpm@va.gov .

a. When emailing the HSR&D Project Modification Mailbox, please type the Subject beginning with the terms "**PMR Status for**" followed by the **Project ID# and Title**. This specific terminology will enable us to sort the emails and identify those that require immediate attention.

b. Emails inquiring about the status of PMRs will be responded to on a daily basis as they are received.

As a reminder, HSR&D ceased accepting PMRs for FY21 in July and will not resume acceptance of new PMRs until October 1, 2021. Exceptions to the PMR

closeout may be made on a case by case basis for true emergencies with concurrence from Scientific Program Managers responsible for the project(s).

- IRBnet is now live for GS14/15 field promotion nominations! If you did not get a chance to attend the Webinar last Wednesday (6/23) week, Copies of the new instructions, FAQs and the June 23 webinar recording have been posted to the centralized positions website:
https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized_positions.cfm
 - HSR&D will no longer be accepting promotion packets by email. The next deadline for promotion nominations is September 1.
- Career Scientist nominations are due 9/1 and can be uploaded into eRA starting 8/1. Review will be complete by January. We are now asking all RCS awards to start on Oct 1, the next fiscal year following the review.
- SAVE THE DATE! Palo Alto will be hosting a virtual CDA Conference September 22-24 (10a.m – 1 p.m. each day Pacific Time) for all current CDA recipients and their mentors, as well as Career Scientists. Meeting planning is underway; keep an eye out for the registration link and announcement.
- The following two targeted solicitations will be posted for the last time in the fall, open only for resubmission of previously submitted proposals:
 - HSR&D Targeted Solicitation for Service Directed Research on Opioids Safety and Opioid Use Disorder (Updated May 20, 2021)
 - HSR&D Targeted Solicitation for Service Directed Research on Social Determinants of Health (Updated May 20, 2021)

RR&D Updates

Patricia A. Dorn, Ph.D.
Karen Lohmann-Siegel

Paul B. Magnuson Award

The Paul B. Magnuson Award is presented annually to a VA RR&D investigator who exemplifies the entrepreneurship, humanitarianism, and dedication to veterans displayed by Dr. Magnuson during his career. The award was established in 1998 in recognition of the importance of rehabilitation research within the VA Health Care System. The award consists of a one-time \$5,000 cash award to an individual, \$50,000 per year for 3 years supplemental funding for their ongoing peer-reviewed research, and a celebratory plaque.

Nominations for the 2022 Paul B. Magnuson Award are being accepted through **September 1, 2021**. Please refer to [Program Guide 1203.06](#) and the [Instructions for Preparing and Submitting a Nomination Packet](#).

Review Updates

Scientific Review Timelines (refer to applicable [FOA/RFA](#) for details)
Please continue to contact [RR&D](#) for guidance and to ask questions.

Summer 2021 - Merit, Career Development and Research Career Scientist:

- Updated RFAs published – March 30, 2021
- LOI and Waiver Request deadline – May 3, 2021 (May 1 falls on a Saturday)
- Last possible application submission deadline (*no changed/corrected applications after this date*) – June 10, 2021
 - NOTE: Biographical Sketch Format (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (Rev. 12/2020 Approved Through 02/28/2023) must be used)
- Scientific Review – August 5-13, 2021
- Scores released – August 17, 2021
- Summary Statements released – September 7, 2021
- Intent-to-Fund notifications – by late September 2021

Fall 2021 – SPiRE:

- NEW RFA published – by July 1, 2021
- Pre-application (LOI and waiver request) deadline – August 2, 2021
- Last possible award application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – September 10, 2021
 - NOTE: Biographical Sketch Format (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (Rev. 12/2020 Approved Through 02/28/2023) must be used)
- Scientific Review – October 22, 2021
- Scores and Summary Statements released – November 12, 2021
- Intent-to-Fund notifications – by late November 2021