

**From:** VHA BLRD-CSR  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 29, 2021 5:45 PM  
**Subject:** CSR September Newsletter



## Clinical Science Research and Development



# Terri Talks

Vol. 3, No. 9, 2021.9.29

## Message from the Director

With September being Suicide Prevention month, I wanted to share some news and thoughts about research on this topic. We are so fortunate to welcome a new Senior Program Manager for Suicide Prevention – please see Joe Constans' details below! Joe will be a critical contact for the field with responsibilities to integrate the ORD portfolio on suicide prevention, lead suicide prevention initiatives and focus on impactful work directed towards decreasing suicide. It's no small task as this area is one of the most complicated to understand, and use understanding to prevent. We have seen some encouraging news though (e.g., [Prevalence and Trends in Suicidal Behavior Among US Military Veterans During the COVID-19 Pandemic | Psychiatry and Behavioral Health | JAMA Psychiatry | JAMA Network](#)). We will continue to work with our clinical operational partners to extend the trend of decreasing rates. In October, all services will publish a Program Announcement regarding specific interests, as well as information from an analysis of our portfolio. Suicide prevention will continue to be one of the most important efforts VA Research can contribute to, so please do reach out to discuss your very best ideas. Note also that the BLRD and CSR Collaborative Merit Review Award is one novel approach for groups of investigators to consider. Please take care, *Terri*

## Significant VA Research Achievement Announced

National/international nephrologists have adopted Cystatin C as the path to a race-free estimate of kidney function, which is based on the work of Michael Shlipak, M.D., M.P.H., that led to his 2018 Barnwell Award, CSRD's highest honor for scientific achievement. Cynthia Delgado, M.D., nephrologist at San Francisco VA Health Care System and former VA Career Development Awardee was a co-lead of the task force that reached the above conclusion.

"Through careful, inciteful research, Dr. Shlipak demonstrated that Cystatin C was a better measure of kidney function than creatinine, as it is not dependent on muscle mass, which varies with disease, aging, gender and exercise. Cystatin C eliminates the need for prior adjustments to creatinine based equations, which made inadequate assumptions about the effects of gender, age and race on muscle," according to Carl Grunfeld, M.D., Ph.D., Associate chief of Staff for Research and Development at the San Francisco VA. He also noted this is a big win for both Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and VA research.

Links to the announcement made by the presidents of NKF and ASN: [Update: Reassessing Inclusion of Race in Diagnosing Kidney Diseases | National Kidney Foundation](#), and the final report was published in the [Journal of the American Society of Nephrology \(JASN\)](#) and the [American Journal of Kidney Diseases \(AJKD\)](#).

## Biospecimen Collection Support Available

VA's Clinical Science Research & Development Service (CSRD) is announcing an opportunity for VA investigators to request support for the collection of biospecimens in CSRD-funded clinical trials. This program is initially being made available as a supplement to ongoing trials, irrespective of topic area. This opportunity is available only to studies that will generate a minimum of 100 specimens. The entire announcement may be accessed at

<https://www.research.va.gov/services/csrdbiospecimens-collection.cfm>



### Amy Byers is named CSRD Research Career Scientist

Amy Byers, Ph.D., M.P.H., has been awarded and named a CSRD Research Career Scientist (RCS). She is located at the San Francisco VA Health Care System and is Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences and Medicine, Division of Geriatrics, at the University of California, San Francisco. Dr. Byers is a clinical epidemiologist with a strong background in aging research and expertise in mathematical epidemiology, geropsychiatry, and utilization of large-scale complex data sources. Her research involves determining the incidence, prevalence, risk factors, and outcomes at the intersection of late-life mental health and physical disorders, with a focus on late-life suicide. She is Principal Investigator

of a CSRD Merit Award longitudinally investigating suicide and suicidal behavior at a

national level in older U.S. Veterans (CX001119). Furthermore, she has been funded by several other agencies, including NIH (NIMH, NIA, and NIMHD), Department of Defense, and UCSF's Older Americans Independence Center.

The RCS ([Research Career Scientist \(RCS\) Award \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov)) is a funding mechanism to support the salaries of non-clinician scientists who have demonstrated extraordinary contributions to VA research beyond their own funded studies and programs.

## CSRD Staff Highlight:

### Welcome Joe Constans!



Joseph Constans, Ph.D., joined CSRD on September 27, 2021 as the Senior Program Manager for Suicide Prevention. Joe has had a 28-year career in VA, starting as a staff psychologist in 1993 and most recently completing 13 years of service as the Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (New Orleans VA). As ACOS/R, he led the effort to restart the research program at the New Orleans VA following the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina. His work included assisting in design and activation of a new research facility and recruiting and growing new investigators. The research program expanded significantly under his leadership, growing from one to twenty VA-funded investigators and involved restarting a now vibrant non-profit research corporation. In his own research program, Joe began his VA research career studying remediation of cognitive bias in individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder. For the past 10 years, his research has concerned studying suicide and homicide prevention interventions, and his research program has been supported with funding from CSRD, HSRD, and DoD. Joe studied at Louisiana State University, Colorado State University, and the Medical College of Pennsylvania before beginning his professional career.

## 124 Applications Received Fall 2021

A total of 124 applications is currently in the process of Receipt and Referral for funding consideration. The breakdown of applications by funding mechanism (Service-Specific Request for Application [RFA]):

- CSRD Merit Review Award (Parent I01) **73 applications**
- BLRD and CSRD Career Development Award (CDA-2) [IK2] **22 applications**
- CSRD Merit Review Award for Clinical Trials (I01) **11 applications**
- BLRD and CSRD Collaborative Merit Review Award (BCCMA) (I01) **6 applications**
- CSRD Combined Proof of Concept and Clinical Trial Merit Review Award (I01) **5 applications**
- CSRD Merit Review Research Career Scientist (RCS) Award (IK6) **3 applications**

- BLRD and CSRD Career Development Award (CDA-1) [IK1] for VA Psychiatrists **2 applications**
- CSRD Award for Research on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (GWVI [I01]) **1 application**
- BLRD and CSRD Career Development Award (CDA-1) [IK1] for Suicide Prevention **1 application**

## Letter of Intent Deadline Approaches

For investigators interested in submitting a clinical trial application for the Spring 2022 review round, an approved letter of intent (LOI) is required. The LOI deadline is November 1, 2021. They must be submitted by the local research office to [clin-review@va.gov](mailto:clin-review@va.gov). Instructions and template for clinical trial LOIs are located here: [https://www.research.va.gov/services/shared\\_docs/resources.cfm#4](https://www.research.va.gov/services/shared_docs/resources.cfm#4) (Section IV, #3)

## 45 Investigators from 24 VAMCs Attend CADE Symposium

In September, CSRD (along with our colleagues in Biomedical Laboratory Research & Development) hosted the 2021 Symposium for Career Development Awardees. A total of 45 early-career investigators, representing 24 different VA Medical Centers, joined this year's meeting via Microsoft Teams. Invited speakers gave presentations about a wide range of topics, including regulatory issues, translational research, working with mentors, and successful proposal-writing. Program participants met with their respective service directors to ask questions and share their experiences. Those investigators who recently completed their third award year also give updates on their work. Each day concluded with a virtual networking hour, allowing awardees and Central Office staff to exchange ideas, problem solve collaboratively, and provide feedback. Our Symposium series is designed so that each Career Development Program participant has two opportunities to attend - after completion of their first and third award years. We look forward to seeing investigators with projects beginning in (calendar years) 2019 and 2021 at next year's meeting.

## DMC Seeking Members

CSRD's Centralized Data Monitoring Committee (DMC) is currently seeking members for two panels – Medical/Surgical (M/S) and Psychiatric, Behavioral Health and Neurologic Disorders (PBN). 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 analyses. 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](mailto:Tamara.Paine@va.gov)).

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