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NORTH FLORIDA/SOUTH GEORGIA VETERANS HEALTH SYSTEM

VA Research Newsletter



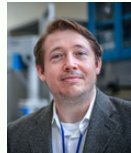
FROM THE CHIEF OF RESEARCH



The start of an academic year brings excitement and new opportunities to welcome trainees, staff, and investigators to collaborate on VA research! This newsletter shares recent results from the VA All Employee Survey, showing that VA Research Service is a great team to be part of. Also included is information about preclinical research on obesity reduction, leadership of research administration, and recently approved new studies. For guidance on conducting VA research, please visit our [webpage](#). Best wishes for the 24-25 academic year!

-David Clark, Associate Chief of Staff for Research Service

FEATURED INVESTIGATOR



Dr. Matthew Schiefer has been a Research Health Scientist at the Malcom Randall VAMC since 2018, and previously was with the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Ohio. He was initially funded by a VA Career Development Award and is currently funded by a Merit Review (R01 equivalent) and a SPIRE (R21 equivalent). All were funded by the VA Rehabilitation Research and Development section of the VA Office of Research and Development. His research focuses on developing new neural interfaces and stimulus waveforms for the vagus nerves to convey a sense of fullness in order to reduce obesity. Dr. Schiefer is also a co-investigator on an NIH R01 under Dr. Ronald Cohen that also focuses on vagus nerve stimulation to treat obesity. Dr. Schiefer currently collaborates with Drs. Marcelo Febo, Damon Lamb, and Prodip Bose to conduct fMRI in his studies and Drs. Joshua Yarrow and Dana Otzel to conduct microCT and DEXA. Dr. Schiefer is also a co-investigator on studies involving 1) neuromodulation to improve bone mineral density following spinal cord injury; and 2) use of artificial neural networks to predict neural responses to electrical stimulation. Dr. Schiefer serves as the Director of the Veterinary Medical Unit (animal research facility) at Malcom Randall VA Medical Center.



FEATURED RESEARCH STAFF



Michael Merritt is the Administrative Officer for Research Service. He supervises the Research Office and provides oversight and coordination of administrative processes. Mr. Merritt is a Veteran who served with the U.S. Army for nearly 9 years, receiving an Honorable Discharge. During his military career he served as a Combat Medic, Eye Technician, and Respiratory Therapist. After discharge he completed a Master of Public Administration degree and began work at the United States Army Aeromedical Research Laboratory at Fort Rucker (now called Fort Novosel) in Alabama. In 2008 he joined the VA Southern Nevada Veterans Healthcare System in Las Vegas as a Research Compliance Officer, and subsequently became an Administrative Officer. In 2017 he moved to Gainesville to become the Administrative Officer for Research Service.

RECENTLY APPROVED STUDIES

• **Diana Gomez-Manjarres, MD:** Effect of treatment combinations on self-reported outcomes in long COVID. Funded by VA Health Systems R&D. • **Loretta Coady-Fariborzian, MD:** Hand Trauma as Frailty Indicator. • **Jess DeLaune, MD:** MODERN: An integrated Phase 2/3 and Phase 3 Trial of MRD-Based Optimization of Adjuvant Therapy in Urothelial Cancer. Funded by Alliance. • **Diana Gomez-Manjarres, MD:** A randomized, double-blind, dose-ranging, placebo-controlled study to evaluate the efficacy and safety of PLN-74809 (bexotegast) for the treatment of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (BEACON-IPF). Funded by Pliant Therapeutics. • **Jungyun Hwang, PhD:** Upregulating spinal circuits to enhance balance and walking and to increase spinal excitability in older adults. Funded by NIH. • **John Williamson, PhD:** Biospecimen Bank at the BRRC Malcom Randall VA. • **Ashutosh Shukla, MD:** Developing an evidence-based model to provide patient-centered care to rural Veterans with advanced chronic kidney disease. Funding renewed by Veterans Rural Health Resource Center.

VA ALL EMPLOYEE SURVEY



Each year the US Department of Veterans Affairs conducts the All Employee Survey. 81% of local Research Service employees at NF/SGVHS participated in this year's survey, and their responses demonstrate pride in their work and satisfaction in their jobs. Specifically, our results show that employees expressed the strongest agreement (≥ 4.25 points out of 5) with the following items:

• My work gives me a feeling of accomplishment • My job is more than just a paycheck • I do more than is actually required • My work relates to my agency's goals • I know what is expected of me • Discrimination is not tolerated at my workplace • I can disclose suspected violations of rules and regulations without fear of reprisal • I believe I will be held accountable for poor performance • My workgroup has job-relevant knowledge and skills • I feel encouraged to innovate • Satisfaction with senior leaders and supervisors • Supervisor supports work/life balance • Supervisor supports employee development • Supervisors treat everyone fairly, regardless of their level in the organization.

Research Service is fortunate to have dedicated employees who care deeply about improving the health and lives of Veterans!

VA RESEARCH SERVICE BY THE NUMBERS

Clinical Studies

107

Human subject and
medical record research



Proportion of Clinical and
Preclinical Research Studies

Preclinical Studies

23

Animal and bench research

Principal Investigators

48

With active projects

Research Staff and Administrative Staff

46

Research Affiliates

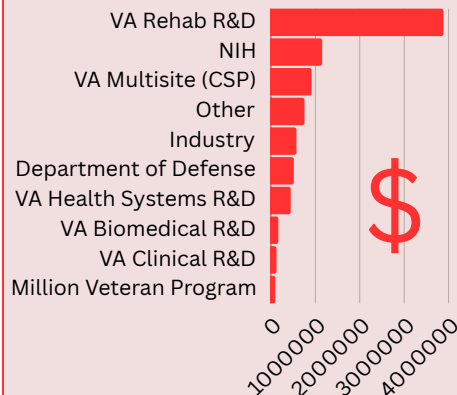
214

Interagency agreements or
non-compensated employees
(UF and NFFRE personnel)

Annual Research Expenditures

**\$9.7
million**

Fiscal Year 2023



Projects funded by US Department of Veterans Affairs

40

Active during Fiscal Year 2024

Research Space: Square Feet

30,287

Research Space: # Rooms

160

Research Equipment

1,367

Pieces of equipment