

Pain/Opioid CORE

VA HSR&D

Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research

August 2021

In this Issue:

NEW: Nominate a study! Pain/Opioid Infographics Pilot Project

Translating research into information for patients

Page 2

Announcements

Congratulations to CORE funding awardees and
HSR&D Health System Impact Award Recipients

Page 3

Pain/Opioid CORE Workgroups

Updates and how to get involved in our
domain-focused workgroups

Page 5

Pain/Opioid CORE Veteran Engagement Panel

Schedule a time with our panel of Veterans to
enhance your research team's work

Page 7

Featured Article: *Shifting the National Consciousness about Pain Treatment*

Call for a national public education campaign
featured in the *Journal of Pain*

Page 7

Research-In-Progress Update: *Expanding Veterans' Access to Opioid Use Disorder Treatment*

Telehealth approaches to expand access and
effectiveness of treatment for opioid use disorder

Page 8

NEW - NOMINATE A STUDY!

Infographics: Translating Research into Information for Patients

We are seeking nominations for recently published studies that you think patients should be aware of as part of a new Pain/Opioid CORE initiative. The new initiative aims to communicate important research results relevant to patients with chronic pain, opioid use, or opioid use disorder and to their caregivers. Because the overall purpose of VA pain/opioid research is to improve clinical care and well-being for Veterans, ensuring that patients have access to research results that could affect their health care decisions is important. Of course, research findings are not initially available in a format that is easy for most patients to understand. The Pain/Opioid CORE will be working to translate select research studies into “infographics.”

For example, Figure 1 (below) shows an excerpt of the SPACE trial results published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the same study paper as an infographic which conveys the essential information relevant to patients. Similar to how the infographic below was created, the Pain/Opioid CORE infographics will be produced by experienced data visualization professionals with iterations of patient input from our Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP).

Nominate a study! Send an email to Tracy Sides (Tracy.Sides@va.gov), Pain/Opioid CORE Coordinator, with a study you would like to see become a patient-facing infographic. CORE leadership, with input from our VEP, will select the studies that become infographics. During the two-year pilot project, six infographics will be produced and disseminated through multiple VA communication channels (e.g., myHealtheVet, newsletters, websites, etc.). Stay tuned for updates on this initiative!

Figure 1. Excerpt of pages from “Effect of Opioid vs Nonopioid Medications on Pain-Related Function in Patients With Chronic Back Pain or Hip or Knee Osteoarthritis Pain: The SPACE Randomized Clinical Trial” ([Krebs et al, JAMA 2018](#)) and associated one-page infographic.

The infographic titled "What works better for long-term pain? Opioids or Non-Opioids?" summarizes the SPACE trial results. It includes the following information:

- What We Already Knew:** Opioids were more likely to cause serious harms such as injuries, breathing trouble, addiction, and even death.
- What We Didn't Know:** Patients and doctors didn't know if opioids worked better for long-term pain than non-opioid pain medications.
- What Was Studied:** VA doctors and researchers recruited 240 VA patients with long-term back, hip, or knee pain. One group received opioids (morphine and oxycodone), and the other group received non-opioids (lidocaine cream, acetaminophen, and aspirin). After one year, this is what they found:
- Pain Interference (0-10 Scale):** A line graph shows that pain interference decreased over 12 months for both groups. The Opioid group started at 5.6 and ended at 3.4. The Non-Opioid group started at 5.4 and ended at 3.3. A note states: "Most study participants in both groups improved over the one-year study."
- Medication Side Effects (0-10 Scale):** A bar chart shows that medication side effects were significantly lower in the Non-Opioid group (0.9) compared to the Opioid group (1.8). A note states: "Medication side effects were twice as common in the opioid group."
- Conclusion:** "VA doctors and researchers concluded that opioids did not work better than non-opioids for long-term pain."
- Source:** See the full study from the Journal of the American Medical Association: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2673971>

ANNOUNCEMENTS**2021 Pain/Opioid CORE Rapid Start Funding Awardees**

We are pleased to announce that seven projects were selected to receive funding through our Rapid Start Funding program. The awardees are:

Project Title: Exploring Pain Management Strategies for Perinatal Veterans

PI Name: Aimee Kroll-Desrosiers, PhD

VA Location: VA Central Western Massachusetts

Co-investigator: Kristin Mattocks, PhD, MPH

Project summary: This study seeks a better understanding of pain-related conditions in and complementary and integrative health (CIH) pain management strategies among perinatal Veterans. Our intent is to learn more about discussions that occur between VA providers and women Veterans regarding management of pain-related conditions prior to or during pregnancy. Additionally, we will explore topics related to pain management and treatment for pregnant Veterans, on which there is virtually no existing literature. We will identify types of CIH approaches acceptable to pregnant and postpartum Veterans and explore whether CIH pain management interventions are currently integrated into care and recommended for perinatal Veterans.



*Aimee
Kroll-Desrosiers*

Project Title: A Mixed Methods Feasibility Study of Integrated Tele-Yoga Therapy for Midlife and Older Women Veterans with Chronic Pain

PI Names: Carolyn Gibson, PhD, MPH & Francesca Nicosia, PhD, C-IAYT

VA Location: San Francisco VA Health Care System

Co-investigators: Karen Seal, MD, MPH & Alison Huang, MD, MAS

Project summary: This project is a pilot feasibility study of an eight-week, video-based tele-yoga therapy program for midlife and older women Veterans with chronic pain. Findings will guide planning for a future pragmatic hybrid implementation-effectiveness trial of group-based tele-yoga therapy to improve patient-centered pain and mental health outcomes for women Veterans with chronic pain and common mental health comorbidities. The project will also inform the integration of clinical Yoga Therapists into collaborative care settings, providing a whole health model for the management of chronic pain and other chronic health conditions.



Carolyn Gibson



Francesca Nicosia

Project Title: A Pilot Study Evaluating Acceptability and Feasibility of Text-Messaging Based Assessment for Rural Veterans with Chronic Pain

PI Name: Krista Scorsone, PhD, RN, PMHNP-BC

VA Location(s): VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System

Co-investigator: Joseph Frank, MD, MPH

Project summary: We aim to evaluate the feasibility of prospective patient-reported outcome assessment and self-management support using a text messaging app to track pain-related function and overall experience among Veterans receiving care for chronic pain management in the VA Community Care Network (CCN). We will also explore Veterans' experiences accessing chronic pain management in the VA CCN. These findings will inform future interventions to improve the quality and safety of care for rural Veterans.



Krista Scorsone

Project Title: Emotional Awareness and Expression Therapy: A Feasibility Pilot in Women Veterans with Chronic Overlapping Pain Conditions

PI Name: Mary A. Driscoll, PhD

VA Location: VA Connecticut Healthcare System

Co-investigators: Alicia Heapy, PhD & Brandon Yarns, MD

Project summary: Relative to men, women Veterans with chronic pain are more likely to be plagued by chronic overlapping pain conditions (COPCs) which are often accompanied by high rates of trauma and psychosocial distress. Traditional psychological interventions for chronic pain do not address disrupted emotional and relational processes. Emotional Awareness and Expression Therapy (EAET) does and early work suggests it may yield promise for those with COPCs. However, it has not been tested with women Veterans utilizing VA care, a group that is acknowledged to be more medically and psychiatrically complex than the predominantly civilian sample for whom EAET has been shown to be safe and effective. Nor has EAET been tested in a virtual format, which would make it more accessible for women Veterans who cite logistical and healthcare system barriers to care. The proposed study is an uncontrolled feasibility pilot in which eighteen women Veterans with fibromyalgia or non-specific back pain will participate in an eight-week EAET group-based protocol, delivered virtually.



Mary Driscoll

Project Title: Optimizing Opioid Safety in End-Stage Kidney and Liver Disease

PI Name: Jessica Ma, MD

VA Locations: VA Palo Alto, Durham VA, and VA Connecticut

Co-investigators: Karl Lorenz, MD, Karleen Giannitrapani, PhD, Jessica Merlin, MD, Anne Black, PhD, and William Becker, MD

Project summary: Opioids are a commonly used therapy in patients with renal and hepatic insufficiency. While there is pharmacologic evidence suggesting that some opioids are safer than others, changes in drug metabolism and availability in end-stage liver and kidney disease can increase risk of significant adverse events. Our project will evaluate significant adverse events in patients with end-stage liver and kidney disease and compare to those without these conditions to have a better understanding of the risks of using specific opioids in this population.



Jessica Ma

Project Title: Admission as Disruption? A Retrospective Cohort Study of Buprenorphine Treatment Continuation in Hospitalized Veterans

PI Name: Hilary Mosher, MD

VA Location: Iowa City VA

Co-investigators: Brian Lund, PharmD & Katherine Hadlandsmyth, PhD

Project summary: The VA continues to expand access to medication therapy, specifically buprenorphine, for opioid use disorder (MOUD). These positive developments create a challenge and opportunity in improving the hospital and perioperative treatment of Veterans with chronic pain and/or opioid use disorder. This work aims to quantify current VA practice patterns in perioperative hospital-based management of surgical patients taking buprenorphine prior to hospitalization and contrast with practice during medical hospitalizations. We will then determine whether inpatient buprenorphine prescribing patterns are associated with post-hospitalization retention/re-engagement in MOUD treatment.



Hilary Mosher

Project Title: Organizational Context and Variation in CIH Use among Veterans with Chronic Pain within the Whole Health System of Care

PI Name: Rendelle Bolton, PhD, MPH, MSW, MA

VA Location: VA Bedford Healthcare System

Co-investigator: Barbara Bokhour, PhD

Project summary: Only a fraction of the five-million Veterans with chronic pain in VA engage in complementary and integrative health (CIH) therapies, with considerable variation in use across VA medical centers despite resources devoted to improving their implementation as part of the Whole Health System of Care. This multiple case study examines how organizational context influences variation in complementary and integrative health use among Veterans with chronic pain. Using qualitative data previously collected over a 2-year period, we will compare how six VA Whole Health Flagship Medical Centers with high and low levels of CIH utilization have structured CIH delivery in their Whole Health Systems of Care, promoted its adoption among patients and providers alike, and addressed implementation barriers/facilitators.



Rendelle Bolton

CORE-Affiliated Researchers Win HSR&D Health System Impact Awards

The VA [HSR&D Health System Impact Award](#) honors [HSR&D](#)- and [QUERI](#)-funded research that has had a direct and important impact on clinical practice or clinical policy within the VA health care system and that has been successfully translated into VA's policy or operations.

Dr. Adam Gordon, an investigator at HSR&D's [Informatics, Decision-Enhancement and Analytic Sciences Center \(IDEAS\)](#) and co-principal investigator for QUERI's Consortium to Disseminate and Understand Implementation of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) Treatment (CONDUIT), "earned the Impact Award for his overall excellence as a clinical investigator, educator, and mentor, and, in particular, his examination of the efficacy, effectiveness, and treatment of persons who have addiction or are vulnerable due to social determinants of health." Dr. Gordon leads the Pain/Opioid CORE Medication Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) Synergy Workgroup and serves on the Pain/Opioid CORE Internal Leadership Committee.

Dr. Hildi Hagedorn, an investigator at HSR&D's [Center for Care Delivery and Outcomes Research \(CCDOR\)](#), Dr. Hagedorn "earned the Impact Award for her work to increase the implementation of evidence-based treatments for Veterans with substance use disorder, especially as it relates to increasing opioid agonist therapy across the VA healthcare system."

Congratulations to both Dr. Adam Gordon and Dr. Hildi Hagedorn on receiving HSR&D Health System Impact Awards this year in recognition for their important research and contributions toward better opioid use disorder treatment among Veterans. To read the full HSR&D article about the 2020 Health System Impact Awards, [click here](#).

Pain/Opioid CORE Workgroups

The Pain/Opioid CORE includes multiple domain-based workgroups to help promote scientific study and identify gaps and priorities in pain management and/or opioid use disorder (OUD) health services research.

Career Development in Pain/Opioid Research Workgroup

Chair: Matthew Bair, MD, MS

A high priority focus of the Pain/Opioid CORE is facilitating career development of early career investigators and investigators new to pain or opioid-related research through collaboration and professional development activities. The Career Development workgroup will move to monthly meetings in September. These will be held the third Monday of each month at 4:00 pm ET. Meeting topics rotate among career development topics; presentations by early career researchers and CORE Rapid Start Funding awardees; and every meeting includes time for open questions and discussion. *Investigators at any stage of their career* are invited to contribute and learn as part of this workgroup's ongoing dialogue regarding career development. The workgroup's next meeting is Monday, September 20th at 4:00 p.m. ET. Contact Matt Bair (Matthew.Bair@va.gov) or Tracy Sides (Tracy.Sides@va.gov) with questions or to join the Career Development in Pain/Opioid Research Workgroup.

Heterogeneity of Treatment Effects in Pain- and Opioid-Related Research Workgroup

Chair: Kelli Allen, PhD

The Heterogeneity of Treatment Effects (HTE) Workgroup brings together researchers and clinicians with expertise in pain- and/or opioid-related treatment interventions, as well as experts in statistical approaches, to advance the science surrounding understanding of treatment response in clinical trials and to support work that leads to practical clinical recommendations regarding tailoring of pain/opioid treatment approaches. The goals of the HTE Workgroup are to improve the understanding of treatment responses and support work that leads to practical clinical recommendations regarding tailoring of pain management and opioid use disorder treatment approaches. Current activities include 1) planning for seminars and other resources to enhance use of rigorous methods for examining heterogeneity of treatment effects in VA pain/opioid research and 2) considering systematic review topics in the area of pain or opioid use disorder treatment that would be of high value to VA researchers and clinicians. The workgroup's next meeting is Friday, September 17th at 1:00 p.m. ET. Contact Kelli Allen (Kelli.Allen@va.gov) or Brian Coleman (Brian.Coleman2@va.gov) with questions or to join the HTE Workgroup. Early career investigators welcome!

Medication Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) in Perioperative Care Workgroup

Co-Chairs: Thomas Hickey, MD & William Becker, MD

The Perioperative MOUD Workgroup focuses on the use of MOUD, specifically buprenorphine, in the perioperative care setting. A priority interest is in the safe and optimal use of MOUD during the preoperative, operative, and postoperative care periods. An article prepared by this workgroup will provide best practice recommendations for a multidisciplinary approach to care coordination, care planning, MOUD administration, and multimodal analgesia in the perioperative setting. The article is scheduled for publication this fall in the journal, *Medical Clinics of North America*.

Medication Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) Synergy Workgroup

Chair: Adam Gordon, MD, MPH

The VHA established addressing the rising numbers of Veterans with opioid use disorder (OUD) as a national priority, with medication treatment as a recommended and standard treatment for OUD (MOUD). Multiple strategies and operational initiatives have been implemented to improve access to and use of MOUD treatment. To facilitate improved access, these programs have become especially focused on non-addiction care settings, such as outpatient primary care, mental health, and pain care environments. Characterizing and understanding ongoing VA initiatives and identifying and prioritizing research gaps in MOUD care are the main priorities of the MOUD Synergy Workgroup. This workgroup meets the first Friday of each month. The next meeting is Friday, September 3rd at 3:00 pm ET. Contact Adam Gordon (Adam.Gordon@va.gov) or Brian Coleman (Brian.Coleman2@va.gov) with questions or to join this workgroup. Early career investigators welcome!

CORE Veteran Engagement Panel Update

The Pain/Opioid CORE Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP) consists of twelve Veterans who have personal experience with chronic pain, opioid use, or opioid use disorder. Veteran members are a diverse group of men and women across a wide age range, including students, retirees, and current workers with varied military, volunteer, and professional experiences.

Since its inception last fall, ten different research teams have met with the Pain/Opioid VEP. Evaluation surveys are sent to both VEP members and researchers following each meeting. We also follow up months later to find out how the researchers' visit with the VEP made a difference for them and their study. The following quote succinctly captures the high satisfaction of researchers following consultation with the CORE VEP: "It was an incredible experience that will definitely improve the current project and future projects." The VEP has provided valuable feedback on a wide variety of research topics including wording of a data collection survey, acceptability of a virtual-reality phantom pain intervention, pain and substance use disorder care experiences of Veterans experiencing housing instability, and a music imagery and listening feasibility study for pain management.

The CORE established this panel as a resource for VA pain/opioid research community to facilitate Veteran-engaged research. Interested in meeting with the VEP about an aspect of your research study or proposal? Limited pre-work from the guest researcher/PI is required. Pain/Opioid CORE staff will meet with your research team to help develop key questions or brainstorm ideas for how the VEP can provide patient-centered feedback to your project. Pain/Opioid CORE staff then drafts a meeting facilitation guide, invites you to a 'dry run' to talk through the guide, facilitates the VEP meeting, and provides you detailed post-VEP meeting notes. The guest researcher attends the VEP meeting to observe, interact, and ask clarifying questions of the panel.

We are currently scheduling study teams with the panel for the months of November 2021 through February 2022. Please contact Tracy Sides at Tracy.Sides@va.gov to learn more or schedule time with the VEP.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Shifting the National Consciousness about Pain Treatment: The Critical Need for a National Public Education Campaign

Burgess DJ, Vallone D, Bair MJ, et al. Shifting the National Consciousness about Pain Treatment: The Critical Need for a National Public Education Campaign. *J Pain*. Published online May 1, 2021. doi: 10.1016/j.jpain.2021.03.156

Several CORE-affiliated investigators (Diana Burgess, Matt Bair, and Stephanie Taylor) and colleagues co-authored an editorial currently in press at the *Journal of Pain*. The authors highlight the challenge of implementing evidence-based clinical pain management guidelines that prioritize multifaceted (including nondrug) approaches against a backdrop of public attitudes and beliefs about chronic pain and its treatment, which are largely a result of misleading messages pushed by the pharmaceutical industry. These misleading messages include, but are not limited to, those promoting the broad use of prescription opioids and minimizing their risks. Public education campaigns around chronic pain and its treatment have been effective in other countries and around commercial tobacco in the U.S., (another example of deliberate obfuscation and misinformation campaigns by an industry to increase profits). The authors emphasize that public education to help address chronic pain management should be a key element of a *comprehensive approach* to implementing evidence-based clinical pain management guidelines that also includes provider-level, payer-level and policy-level initiatives. Given the dual crises of chronic pain and opioid use, the authors make a compelling case for a national public health campaign to educate the American public on chronic pain, its treatment, and nondrug pain management options.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS UPDATE**Using Telehealth to Expand Treatment Access for Veterans with Opioid Use Disorder**

Lewei (Allison) Lin, MD (VA Ann Arbor), is principal investigator for a study that is gathering information from patients and clinicians that will guide development of a pilot telehealth opioid use disorder (OUD) intervention among Veterans. The study information gathered will also be used to describe in more detail the VA OUD treatment landscape, so that opportunities to further optimize care can be identified. Her five-year study was highlighted in the June 2021 issue of [IN PROGRESS](#), a quarterly newsletter featuring ongoing HSR&D research. The anticipated research outcomes are “to help develop and improve different telehealth treatment models and to better understand the quality of telehealth care and outcomes, in order to both increase access and improve outcomes for Veterans with opioid and other substance use disorders.” You can read the full article here: [Using Telehealth to Expand Treatment Access for Veterans with Opioid Use Disorder || In Progress \(va.gov\)](#).

Upcoming Pain/Opioid Related Events**20th Annual Pain Medicine Meeting, Call for Abstracts: "Pain 2021: A Whole New World" – Deadline: August 26, 2021**

The [2021 Annual Pain Medicine Meeting](#), organized by the American Society of Regional Anesthesia (ASRA), will be November 18-20, 2021 in San Francisco, California. The meeting theme, “Pain 2021: A Whole New World,” is intended to reflect the changes around health care due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting’s content will include presentations and explanations by experts and leaders in pain medicine about the rising challenges affecting pain medicine due to the pandemic and ways of avoiding and solving such challenges. The abstract submission deadline is August 26, 2021. More information can be found on [the meeting website](#).

PAINWeek Conference – September 7-11, 2021

PAINWeek, a national conference on pain for frontline practitioners, will be September 7-11, 2021 in Las Vegas, Nevada. For more information or to register, [click here](#).

NAADAC Annual Conference – October 28-30, 2021

The National Association for Addiction Professionals annual conference (NAADAC) will be held virtually October 28-30, 2021. For more information and registration, [click here](#).

45th Annual AMERSA Conference – November 3-5, 2021

The Association for Multidisciplinary Education and Research in Substance use and Addiction (AMERSA) will hold its annual conference virtually November 3-5, 2021. This year’s theme is “Transforming Care Through Evidence and Policy.” For more information and registration, [click here](#).

Annual ISAM Conference – November 19-21, 2021

The annual International Society of Addiction Medicine (ISAM) conference will be held virtually November 19-21, 2021. This global event aims to “provide addiction medicine education and an opportunity to highlight new research, innovative practices, sociopolitical ideas, and new approaches to treatment.” For more information and registration, [click here](#).

Pain/Opioid CORE

For more information and updates on the Pain/Opioid CORE

To be added to our email list to receive our newsletter and research updates, please contact Brian C. Coleman, DC at Brian.Coleman2@va.gov or Tracy Sides, PhD, MPH at Tracy.Sides@va.gov.

VA HSR&D COREs

Access CORE

Pain/Opioid CORE

Suicide Prevention CORE

Virtual Care CORE

[Click here](#) for more information about VA HSR&D Consortia of Research (COREs).