

Pain/Opioid CORE

VA HSR&D

Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research

October 2021

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VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

NEW WEBSITE!**Pain/Opioid CORE launches new online resources**

The Pain/Opioid CORE launched a new public [website!](#) We created the website to make it easier for others to learn about the CORE – who we are, what we do, and how to get involved. The site was primarily designed for pain/opioid researchers who focus on Veteran populations – whether or not they work at a VA facility.



**Identify priority
research areas**



**Build a research
network**



**Develop support
structures for
early-career
investigators**



**Facilitate
Veteran and
partner-engaged
research**



**Share progress
with patients,
partners, and
researchers**

The **Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research (CORE)** strives to enhance collaboration and accelerate health services research related to pain (especially nondrug interventions for chronic pain), opioid prescribing, and opioid use disorder. Together with our partners, the Pain/Opioid CORE promotes efforts to move research findings into wider use. The Pain/Opioid CORE is supported by funding from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D).

In addition to sharing information about the Pain/Opioid CORE, the website is also intended to connect VA researchers with relevant resources. Examples include:

- Each year, the CORE issues a request for applications (RFA) for pilot study funding through our Rapid Start Funding Program. We give preference to early career investigators, especially those not affiliated with a VA Center of Innovation (COIN). The next RFA will be issued in December 2021 or January 2022. [Learn More >>](#)
- The CORE maintains a Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP) as a resource to facilitate more Veteran-engaged pain/opioid research. The Pain/Opioid CORE VEP can provide support to VA investigators at any point in the research life cycle, from project proposal through publication. The 12-member panel has met monthly for more than a year, providing feedback about study design and materials, barriers and facilitators to Veteran participation, and brainstorming solutions to potential and actual challenges encountered by research teams. [Meet Members of the Panel >>](#)
- A high priority of the CORE is to facilitate career development of early career VA investigators and investigators new to pain or opioid-related research through collaboration and professional development activities. The Pain/Opioid Research Career Development workgroup is open to VA investigators at any stage of their career. The mission of the workgroup is to facilitate connections and dialogue between established researchers and early career VA investigators interested in pain and opioid-related research and expand the professional networks of members. [Learn More >>](#)
- We developed a “beta version” of a Pain/Opioid Research Resource Library that we plan to maintain and expand over time. The library contains an at-a-glance table of contents to help navigate the available resources, which include clinical practice guidelines, consensus recommendations, and CORE research priorities. [View the Resource Library >>](#)

In addition to the public website, the Pain/Opioid CORE updated its [VA HSR&D webpage](#) and created a [VA Intranet site](#), with information available to anyone across the VA system, which also includes a collection of linked limited-access intranet sites for CORE workgroup collaboration. [Visit the Pain/Opioid CORE’s Intranet Site >>](#)

NOMINATE A STUDY!

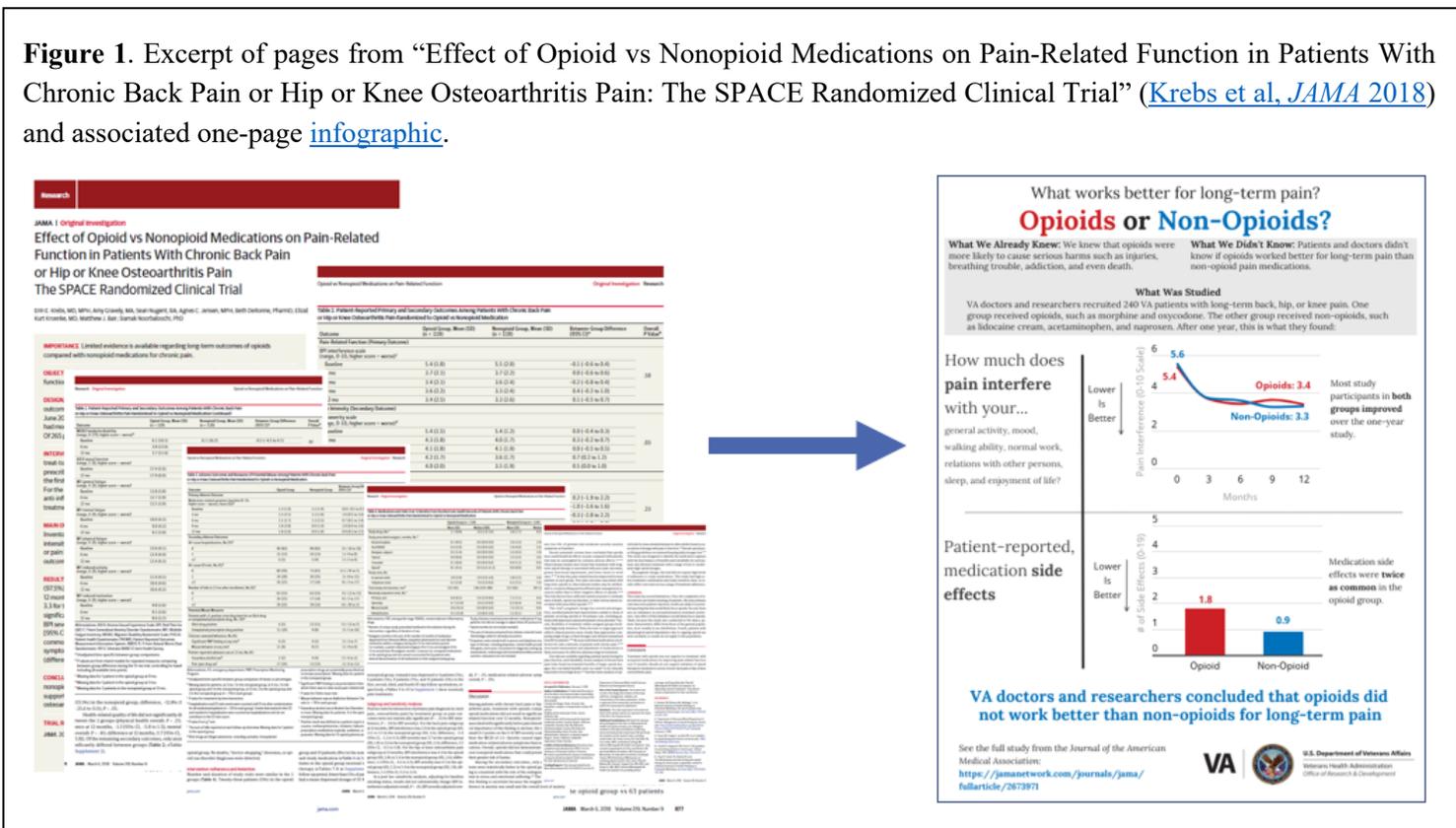
Infographics: Translating Research into Information for Patients

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 – be sure to include a sentence about why you think the results are important to patients. 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.



ANNOUNCEMENTS**Coming Soon: 2022 Pain/Opioid CORE Rapid Start Funding Cycle**

The next request for applications (RFA) for the Pain/Opioid CORE Rapid Start Funding program will be issued in mid-December 2021 with an anticipated due date of February 1, 2022. [More information >>](#)

Upcoming Presentations: Pain/Opioid Research Career Development Workgroup

November 15th *“Mixed Reality Based System to Manage Phantom Pain after Lower Limb Amputation: A Pilot Study”*

Thiru Annaswamy, MD (North Texas VA) will present on his pilot study and share about his experiences consulting with the Pain/Opioid CORE Veteran Engagement Panel and as a 2020 Rapid Start Funding awardee.

December 20th *“A Modified Hub and Spoke Model to Improve Access to MOUD”*

Greg Beehler, PhD and **Sarah Heavey, PhD, MPH** (VA Western New York) will present on their pilot study.

Workgroup meetings include time for dialogue about a variety of research career development topics relevant to VA investigators, especially early career investigators. See the next section or [Learn more about the workgroup >>](#)

CORE Veteran Engagement Panel - A Resource for VA Researchers

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 from across a wide range of ages and backgrounds, including students, retirees, and current workers with varied military, volunteer, and professional experiences.

Since its inception last fall, many 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, 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. Staff then draft a meeting facilitation guide, invite you to a ‘dry run’ to talk through the guide, facilitate the VEP meeting, and provide you detailed meeting notes. The guest researcher attends the VEP meeting to observe, interact, and ask clarifying questions of the panel.

Please contact Tracy Sides at Tracy.Sides@va.gov with questions or to schedule time with the VEP. [Learn more >>](#)

FEATURED ARTICLE**Chronic Pain Treatment Should Include Psychological Interventions**

Driscoll M, Edwards R, Becker W, Kaptchuk T, & Kerns R. Psychological Interventions for the Treatment of Chronic Pain in Adults. *Psychol Sci Public Interest*. 2021 Sep;22(2):52-95. doi: 10.1177/15291006211008157. [[PubMed Link](#)]

(The following is an excerpt from an [online article](#) by the Association for Psychological Science.)

Research has shown that psychological factors can play a role in the onset, severity, and duration of chronic pain. For those reasons, several psychological interventions have been shown to be effective in treating chronic pain. A team of researchers explored how psychological interventions can be part of a comprehensive plan to manage chronic pain while reducing the need for surgeries and potentially dangerous medications.

[The article] describe the interventions that have been most widely studied, including:

- Supportive psychotherapy, which emphasizes unconditional acceptance and empathic understanding
- Relaxation training, or the use of breathing, muscle relaxation, and visual imagery to counteract the body's stress response
- Biofeedback, which involves monitoring patients' physiological responses to stress and pain (e.g., increased heart rate, muscle tension) and teaching them how to down-regulate these responses
- Hypnosis by a trained clinician, which may induce changes in pain processing, expectations, or perception and incorporates relaxation training
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy, in which patients learn to reframe maladaptive thoughts about pain that cause distress; change unhelpful behaviors, such as isolation and inactivity; and develop helpful behavioral coping strategies (e.g., relaxation)
- Mindfulness-based interventions, which help to disentangle physical pain from emotional pain via increased awareness of the body, the breath, and activity
- Psychologically informed physical therapy, which integrates physical therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy

The report also addresses topics such as integrated pain care, or the blending of medical, psychological, and social aspects of health care; the future of pain treatment; and improving the availability and integration of pain-management strategies.

Lead author, Mary Driscoll, was interviewed about the article in an episode of the *Under the Cortex* podcast (15 minutes). [Listen to the interview >>](#)

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 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 meets monthly on the third Monday 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, November 15th 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 VA 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, December 3rd 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 winter 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, November 5th 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!

Upcoming Pain/Opioid Related Events

NAADAC Annual Conference (virtual) – 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 (virtual) – 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](#).

SAVE-THE-DATE: 2022 Annual Scientific Meeting of the US Association for the Study of Pain (USASP) – May 19-21, 2022

The 2022 Annual Scientific Meeting (hybrid) of the USASP will be held at the University of Cincinnati (Ohio) from May 19-21, 2022. Stay tuned for upcoming call for abstracts (poster and paper presentations), symposia, and workshops. The USASP brings diverse perspectives, including those of scientists, clinicians, health-care providers, and policymakers, together to stimulate and support the study of pain and to translate that knowledge into improved pain relief. For more information see the [USASP website](#).



[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.

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).