

Pain/Opioid CORE

VA HSR&D

Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research

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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2022 Pain/Opioid CORE Rapid Start Funding Awardees

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



Ashley Griffin



Sarah Javier

Project Title: Proactive Messaging to Facilitate Veteran Engagement in Non-Pharmacological Pain Treatments

Principal Investigator(s): Ashley Griffin, PhD and Sarah Javier, PhD

VA Location: VA Palo Alto Health Care System, Palo Alto, CA

Senior PI & Co-Investigator(s): Amanda Midboe, PhD; Marianne Matthias, PhD; Donna Zulman, MD, MS; and Stephanie Shimada, PhD

Project Summary: The proposed study aims to elicit Veterans' preferences for both content of proactive messages and preferred outreach modality to facilitate engagement in non-pharmacological psychological approaches for chronic pain (cognitive-behavioral therapy [CBT], mindfulness-based stress reduction [MBSR], and acceptance and commitment therapy [ACT]). Our work is informed by the eHealth Enhanced Chronic Care Model and Theory of Planned Behavior. In Aim 1, we will utilize a user-centered, rapid prototyping approach with 10-15 Veterans from Veteran engagement panels to refine messages promoting engagement in non-pharmacological psychological chronic pain treatments. In Aim 2, we will conduct individual interviews with 30 diverse Veterans with chronic pain to examine their preferences for the modality and timing of communication, and perceived impact of proactive messages refined in Aim 1. Our study will inform future research spanning the topic areas of health informatics, chronic pain, and health disparities.



Meilen Munoz

Project Title: Engaging Hospitalized Veterans in Non-pharmacologic Treatments for Chronic Pain

Principal Investigator(s): Meilen Chang Munoz, MD, PhD, MS

VA Location: Sacramento VA Medical Center, Mather, CA

Senior PI & Co-Investigator(s): Stephen Henry, MD; Regina Godbout, MD; Marianne Matthias, PhD; and Dinithi Iddawela, MD

Project Summary:

This project will be a pilot randomized trial, with the primary goal of assessing feasibility and data collection needed for a subsequent fully powered study. We will recruit and randomize patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain at baseline who are hospitalized for problems not related to pain. Patients assigned to the intervention arm will be asked to view a patient education video, and then they will receive a brief introduction to 3 non-pharmacologic outpatient treatment strategies that are readily available at Sacramento VAMC and were endorsed by the VA State-of-the-Art conferences: yoga, standard acupuncture and mindfulness-based stress reduction. Study participants will choose whichever treatments they are interested in and this information will be relayed to the inpatient medical team. Study measures, including whether a referral was made at discharge for each treatment option, whether follow through is documented and the patient's baseline prescribed opioid use will be collected once patients have completed intervention and control activities.



Danielle Wesolowicz

Project Title: Development of a Group Psychotherapy Protocol for Pain and Co-occurring Substance Use

Principal Investigator(s): Danielle Wesolowicz, PhD

VA Location: VA Connecticut Healthcare System, West Haven, CT

Senior PI & Co-Investigator(s): Sara Edmond, PhD

Project Summary: Pain and substance use frequently co-occur, with individuals reporting use of substances to cope with pain and pain as a barrier to cessation. Our team will develop a group-based, peer-supported intervention incorporating Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills to improve management of co-occurring substance use and chronic pain. Specifically, we aim to identify intervention objectives, select theoretical methods, and solicit feedback regarding intervention protocol prototypes to inform a future pilot trial of the intervention.



Charles Penza

Project Title: Pilot Study Testing the Feasibility to Implement Virtual Monitoring of Pain, Enjoyment of Life, and General Activity (PEG) For Veterans Seeking On-Station Chiropractic Care

Principal Investigator: Charles Penza, DC, PhD

VA Location: Orlando VA Healthcare System, Orlando, FL

Senior PI & Co-Investigator(s): Matthew Bair, MD

Project Summary: This project develops a partnership between clinic and research services within the Orlando Veterans Administration Health Care System (OVAHCS) to virtually monitor pain severity and interference before, during, and after receiving chiropractic care that is asynchronous to health care visits. More specifically, we aim to assess the feasibility to use the HSR&D funded initiative Patient Engagement, Tracking, and Long-term Support (PETALS) platform to use short message system (SMS) text messaging to monitor weekly Pain, Enjoyment of Life, and General Activity (PEG) scores in Veterans seeking on station chiropractic services. Adopting this technology-aided approach minimizes clinical staff burden of collecting week-to-week patient reported outcomes and has the potential to enhance our understanding of treatment response trajectories.



Victoria Powell

Project Title: Association of Nociplastic Features with Functional Status and Treatment Utilization in Aging Veterans with Chronic Low Back Pain

Principal Investigator(s): Victoria Powell, MD

VA Location: LTC Charles S. Kettles VA Medical Center, Ann Arbor, MI

Senior PI & Co-Investigator(s): Sarah Krein, RN, PhD; Maria Silveira, MD, MA, MPH; Pooja Lagisetty, MD, MSc; Neil Alexander MD, MS; and Daniel Clauw, MD

Project Summary: One-third of all Veterans report chronic low back pain (CLBP), and many older adults experience little or no functional improvement despite current treatment. Central sensitization, or “nociplastic” pain is a distinct etiology whereby altered central nervous system processing amplifies physical sensations and imbues them with emotional significance. The goal of this project is to ascertain the role that nociplastic features play in older Veterans with CLBP. We plan to elucidate the relationship between nociplastic features, functional impairment, and treatment utilization (including opioids). A better understanding of these relationships may lead to targeted intervention development to improve overall function in older Veterans with CLBP.

New Resource for VA Investigators

Methods Advisory Sessions Available for Researchers Interested in Heterogeneity of Treatment Effects

The Pain/Opioid CORE offers a number of domain-focused workgroups to connect investigators with similar interests and facilitate scientific advancement in their respective areas. The Heterogeneity of Treatment Effects (HTE) Workgroup supports scientific study related to the differential effectiveness of treatments, or combinations of treatments, aimed at reducing pain and/or opioid use. Studying treatment effect heterogeneity involves the application of rigorous and innovative statistical and data science methods to clinical trial data, electronic health record data, and other sources of patient data.

The HTE Workgroup now offers methods advisory sessions to chronic pain- and opioid-focused investigators who seek expert input on methodological approaches to examining treatment effect heterogeneity. Advisory sessions are offered as a complementary resource to VA pain/opioid investigators. The objectives of these sessions are to enable investigators to rigorously examine HTE in their existing pain and opioid focused data, help design HTE analysis plans for new funding proposals, and provide a learning environment for HTE methods through involvement of leading methodologists.

Advisory Session Participants Include:

- **Pain/Opioid Research Teams:** VA Pain/Opioid investigators, including early-career investigators and trainees, are eligible to present at the advisory sessions, whether seeking guidance on HTE analyses of existing data or refining methods and aims related to HTE in future grant submissions.
- **HTE Methodology Experts:** The HTE Workgroup has organized a group of expert statisticians and methodologists related to HTE-focused analyses who will be invited to participate in specific sessions. Advisory session facilitators will aim to match the expertise of methodologists with the specific research questions to be discussed during the session.
- **Other Attendees:** While discussants will typically be limited to members of the research team, methodology experts, and advisory session facilitators, other investigators are welcome to attend advisory sessions as an active learning opportunity to observe practical examples of HTE analysis plans.

Advisory sessions for interested research teams are now available. To apply for a complementary HTE advisory session, submit a brief description of your study, research question(s), and anticipated next steps after participating in the advisory session (e.g., grant submission, analyses, manuscript). Research teams invited for an advisory session will participate in a brief planning call with the advisory session facilitators in advance of their scheduled session to prepare materials.

Please contact HTE Workgroup Chair Kelli Allen (Kelli.Allen@va.gov) and Pain/Opioid CORE Coordinator Brian Coleman (Brian.Coleman2@va.gov) with questions or to apply for an HTE methods advisory session.

NOMINATE A STUDY!**Infographics Initiative**

The Pain/Opioid CORE recently launched an [initiative](#) to produce a series of one-page “infographics,” each of which summarizes results from a health services research study that is relevant to patients with chronic pain, opioid use, or opioid use disorder and to their caregivers.

Nominate a study! Production of our first infographic is underway, but we are still looking for article nominations for future infographics. Send an email to Tracy Sides (Tracy.Sides@va.gov), Pain/Opioid CORE Coordinator, with a study you think would make a meaningful 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 Veteran Engagement Panel, will select the studies that become infographics.

CORE Veteran Engagement Panel: Making a Difference for VA Research

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. The panel meets monthly with a different guest research team.

Since its inception, the VEP has met with more than 18 project teams and provided feedback on a variety of research topics including wording of a data collection survey, Annie text messaging protocols, chronic pain and substance use disorder care experiences of Veterans with housing instability, and a music imagery and listening feasibility study for pain management.

Recently, the VEP reviewed and provided feedback on the Pain/Opioid CORE-nominated Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP) report: *Implementation of Evidence-Based Psychotherapies for Chronic Pain and Chronic Mental Health Conditions*. As a follow up, two members will serve as discussants during the May 25th ESP Cyberseminar to provide the VEP's perspective on the ESP report (see events [below](#) for more information and registration).

The CORE established this panel to connect Veterans with the VA pain/opioid research community and facilitate Veteran-engaged research. For more information about the meeting process, [see this one-page overview on the VA Intranet](#). **Interest in meeting with the Pain/Opioid CORE VEP is increasing, reach out today to schedule a consultation with the VEP at one of their summer or fall meetings.**



Members of the Pain/Opioid CORE Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP) in a Webex breakout session at a recent meeting.

Contact Tracy Sides at Tracy.Sides@va.gov with questions or to schedule a consultation with the VEP. [Learn more >>](#)

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 Career Development Workgroup's next meeting is May 16th, 4:00-5:00pm ET, and will feature VA Office of Health Equity programs and resources for researchers (Lauren Korshak, presenter) and a discussion of HSR&D's updated research priorities (Matt Bair).

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- 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; 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; and 3) organizing Advisory Sessions, which will connect HSR&D pain and opioid focused researchers with methodologists who have expertise related to examining heterogeneity of treatment effects. 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. A recent HSR&D Spotlight on Pain Management cyberseminar, presented by workgroup members Thomas Hickey and Caroline Falker, featured recommendations for a multidisciplinary approach to care coordination, care planning, MOUD administration, and multimodal analgesia in the perioperative setting ([link to video recording](#)). The presentation was based on the workgroup's January 2022 publication in the journal, *Medical Clinics of North America* ([PubMed Link](#)). Contact Thomas Hickey (Thomas.Hickey3@va.gov) or William Becker (William.Becker4@va.gov) with questions.

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 is in a writing phase on two projects: organizational synergy and research synergy. Contact Adam Gordon (Adam.Gordon@va.gov) or Spencer Calder (Spencer.Calder@va.gov) with questions.

Upcoming Events

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. [Registration](#) is now open. 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](#).

Spotlight on Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP) Cyberseminar – May 25, 2022

Wei (Denise) Duan-Porter and Elizabeth Goldsmith will present their ESP report: [*Implementation of Evidence-Based Psychotherapies for Chronic Pain and Chronic Mental Health Conditions*](#), which was a nominated topic by the Pain/Opioid CORE. Alicia Heapy (CORE co-PI), Jennifer Murphy (Dir. of Behavioral Pain Medicine), and two Veterans from the CORE Veteran Engagement Panel will serve as discussants at this session focused on barriers and facilitators to implementation of evidence-based psychotherapies. For more information or to register visit the [VA HSR&D website](#).

HSR&D Spotlight on Pain Management (SoPM) Cyberseminars – June 7, 2022

The HSR&D Spotlight on Pain Management Cyberseminar series is held monthly to discuss pain-relevant health services research and support evidence-based improvements in pain management for Veterans. Travis Lovejoy will present in June [[register here](#)]. For more information or to access past SoPM Cyberseminar recordings, visit the [VA HSR&D website](#).

IASP Conference 2022 World Congress on Pain – September 19-23, 2022

The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) 2022 World Congress on Pain will be held in Toronto, Canada from September 19-23, 2022. The biennial World Congress on Pain brings together more than 7,000 scientists, clinicians, and healthcare providers from around the world and across pain disciplines to stimulate and share pain research and to translate that knowledge into improved patient outcomes. IASP has declared 2022 the [Global Year for Translating Pain Knowledge to Practice](#). For more information see the [IASP World Congress website](#). Register to attend the conference [here](#).

Pain/Opioid CORE

[More information and updates on the Pain/Opioid CORE >>](#)

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