

Pain/Opioid CORE

VA HSR

Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research

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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

2024 Pain/Opioid CORE Whole Health Rapid Start Funding Awardees

We are pleased to announce that four projects were selected to receive funding through our Rapid Start Funding program. This year's funding announcement focused on rapid quality improvement and program evaluation on Whole Health approaches for pain and/or opioid use disorder (OUD).

The awardees are:



Anne Black

Project Title: Barriers and facilitators to providers' use of the Personal Health Inventory (PHI) with Veterans on long-term opioid therapy

Principal Investigator: Anne Black, PhD

VA Location: VA Connecticut

Project Summary: Best practice guidelines for chronic pain management align with the emerging Whole Health approach to care within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), sharing priorities of health education, self-management, and integration of complementary and integrative health (CIH) modalities as part of clinical care. One Whole Health tool, the Personal Health Inventory (PHI), is designed to facilitate personal health planning across life domains and ground goal setting in a

Veteran's mission, aspiration, and purpose. For providers working with Veterans on long-term opioid therapy (LTOT) for whom harms outweigh benefits, or reassessment of chronic pain management is indicated by best practice, the PHI may be particularly useful to engage discussion around treatment goals and facilitate shared decision-making to improve care and well-being. However current data indicate that documented use of the PHI with Veterans on LTOT remains rare to date. The Aims of this study are to determine barriers and facilitators to use of the PHI in the context of chronic pain management by (1) administering a new survey, informed by VA Operations leaders, to providers working with Veterans on LTOT and (2) conducting qualitative interviews with a subset of respondents to gain insight into survey responses. With VA Operations and other research partners, we will consider the implications of study results for intervention to broaden use of the PHI in chronic pain management.



Rendelle Bolton

Project Title: Cross-System Whole Health and Complementary and Integrative Health Resource Sharing for Chronic Pain Management

Principal Investigator: Rendelle Bolton, PhD, MPH

VA Location: VA Bedford Healthcare System

Co-Investigators: Barbara Bokhour, PhD & Varsha Vimalananda, MD, MPH

Project Summary: Whole Health (WH) and complementary and integrative health (CIH) therapies are first-line approaches for managing chronic pain. Factors limiting their accessibility contribute to WH and CIH under-utilization among patients with chronic pain, particularly among rural-living Veterans. Innovative approaches that expand WH and CIH access while maximizing existing resources are

needed. This study will describe (1) how current WH and CIH resource-sharing approaches (e.g., clinical resource hubs, hub-and-spoke models, resource sharing agreements) in VA are organized, implemented, and coordinated; and (2) apply lessons learned in partnership with VISN 1 to inform and evaluate local resource-sharing efforts. Results will lead to the development of an implementation resource guide.



Felice Indindoli

Project Title: Rapid Quality Improvement and Evaluation of an Acupuncture Therapy Clinic for Peri/Post Menopausal Women Veterans with Chronic Pain (A-MVP)

Principal Investigator: Felice Indindoli, D.Ac., L.Ac., dipl Ac (NCCAOM)

VA Location: Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital, Bedford, Massachusetts; San Francisco VA Health Care System

Senior PI* & Co-Investigator: *Carolyn Gibson, PhD, MPH & Lisa J. Taylor-Swanson, PhD, L.Ac.

Project Summary: This study will conduct a program evaluation of the ENRM Veterans Hospital's Women's Acupuncture Pain Clinic. Almost half of those seeking care in this clinic are of typical peri- and postmenopausal age, and menopause status and related symptoms contribute to pain

management considerations. Findings from this study will be used to improve and refine clinic procedures, including clarification of resource needs for peri- and postmenopausal women Veterans with chronic pain. The findings of this study may be used to improve implementation and expansion of similar clinics across VA, to promote programs to improve chronic pain and common comorbidities in women Veterans across the lifespan, and to support future efforts to study acupuncture and CIH interventions for multi-modal menopause-related care. To our knowledge, this is the only VA clinic offering acupuncture pain care in a gender-specific setting.



*Aimee
Krill-Desrosiers*

Project Title: Exploring the Use of Whole Health to Support the Care of Pregnant Veterans

Principal Investigator: Aimee Krill-Desrosiers, PhD

VA Location: VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System

Co-Investigators: Kristin Mattocks, PhD, MPH; Megan Brault, PhD; & Anne Black, PhD

Project Summary: Nearly 15% of pregnant Veterans experience chronic musculoskeletal pain, but only a small proportion receive any CIH or Whole Health care during pregnancy, despite a desire for greater access to these types of pain management strategies. This project seeks a better understanding of Whole Health availability, use, referrals, and practices for pregnant Veterans with chronic pain from the perspective of VA women's health providers and Whole Health leaders. Our objectives are to explore Whole Health utilization and referral patterns for pregnant Veterans at VA facilities to

understand what is needed to improve communication and/or use of Whole Health among pregnant Veterans. These findings will be translated into an implementation blueprint to further develop strategies that increase the uptake of Whole Health among this growing population of Veterans.

Revised Pain/Opioid CORE Mission Statement & Scope

During the 2023 Pain/Opioid CORE Annual In-Person meeting, CORE principal investigators convened with representatives from the CORE's Internal Leadership Committee, Office of Researcher and Development leaders, and VA program office leaders (OMHSP-SUD, PMOP, OPCCCT) for strategic planning discussions related to future directions of the CORE. Senior CORE staff conducted key informant interviews with leaders, Veterans, CORE network members, staff, and other affected groups in advance and presented a summary of these listening sessions at the annual meeting. Throughout the day-and-a-half meeting, attendees engaged in a series of discussions, including reviewing the CORE mission statement and scope. Attendees identified a need to better clarify the CORE's focus areas. As a result of those and further conversations in recent months, the Pain/Opioid CORE is pleased to share its clarified mission statement and scope.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research (CORE) strives to build capacity and enhance collaboration to advance Veteran-centered research on pain conditions and opioid use disorder (OUD). Together with our partners, the Pain/Opioid CORE promotes efforts to move research findings into wider use.

SCOPE

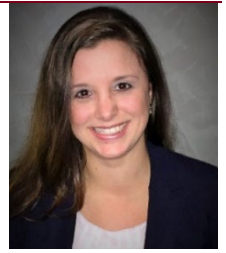
- Pain and/or OUD treatments and care delivery models
- Practice and policy initiatives related to pain and/or OUD
- OUD prevention and harm reduction
- Prevention and management of prescription opioid harms

Within this scope, the CORE is also interested in the co-occurrence of physical and mental health conditions with pain and OUD, including other use disorders. Treatment approaches of interest include medications and noninvasive nondrug therapies.

Pain/Opioid CORE Member Highlight

Sara Edmond, PhD

Sara serves as a Research Psychologist at the Connecticut VA. Over recent years, Sara has been dedicated to enriching and making significant contributions to the field of pain and opioid research. Some notable achievements include:



VA Pain Services Evaluation Program: A partnership between the PRIME Center and the PMOP Program Office

- Sara currently leads the Pain Services Evaluation Program, whose goal is to conduct rigorous partnered program evaluation to 1) develop and refine measurement approaches for tracking indicators of high-quality pain care and high functioning pain management teams (PMTs), 2) evaluate the impact of PMOP initiatives and policies on pain care and PMTs throughout VHA, and 3) support PMOP in the development and implementation of best practices for PMTs. Sara and her team recently developed and launched the PMT Tracking Application, an application and dashboard used by PMOP to track the status of medical centers designate interdisciplinary PMTs. The data from this application will support improved understanding in the variability of PMT care across the VHA system. Additionally, Sara leads the evaluation of three PMOP focused initiatives that are implementing new clinical programs/staffing within PMTs.

CORE Project: *Delphi Study on Diagnostic Challenges Regarding Opioid Dependence and OUD In Long-Term Opioid Therapy*

- Many patients who are prescribed long-term opioid therapy are at risk for or already experiencing harms, with little provider guidance on how best to support these patients. There is no consensus in the field on how to conceptualize this group of patients or what treatments are best, and definitional problems complicate clinical, research, and policy matters. To address this problem, Sara and colleagues began a Delphi study, in 2021, to build consensus on the need for, definition of, and potential criteria for a new diagnostic entity. Results were published in three papers [[Article 1](#), [Article 2](#), [Article 3](#)]. This work is being continued in a U24 grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) where they will work to generate broader consensus on a definition, list of symptoms/behaviors, and names for this entity.

Co-I on 2022 CORE RSF Project: *Development of a group psychotherapy protocol for pain and co-occurring substance use*

- Sara and her mentee Danielle Wesolowicz collaborated to develop a group psychotherapy protocol to address comorbid pain and substance use. Through this project, they aim to teach adaptive coping skills for pain and reduce self-medicating behaviors among individuals with chronic pain and substance use. Sara and Danielle consulted with the Pain/Opioid CORE Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP) on this project, and shared that, **“The Veteran Engagement Panel is one of the most valuable resources offered by the CORE... I always find VEP members to be thoughtful and helpful.”** Sara and Danielle anticipate conducting a small pre-pilot of this protocol this summer.

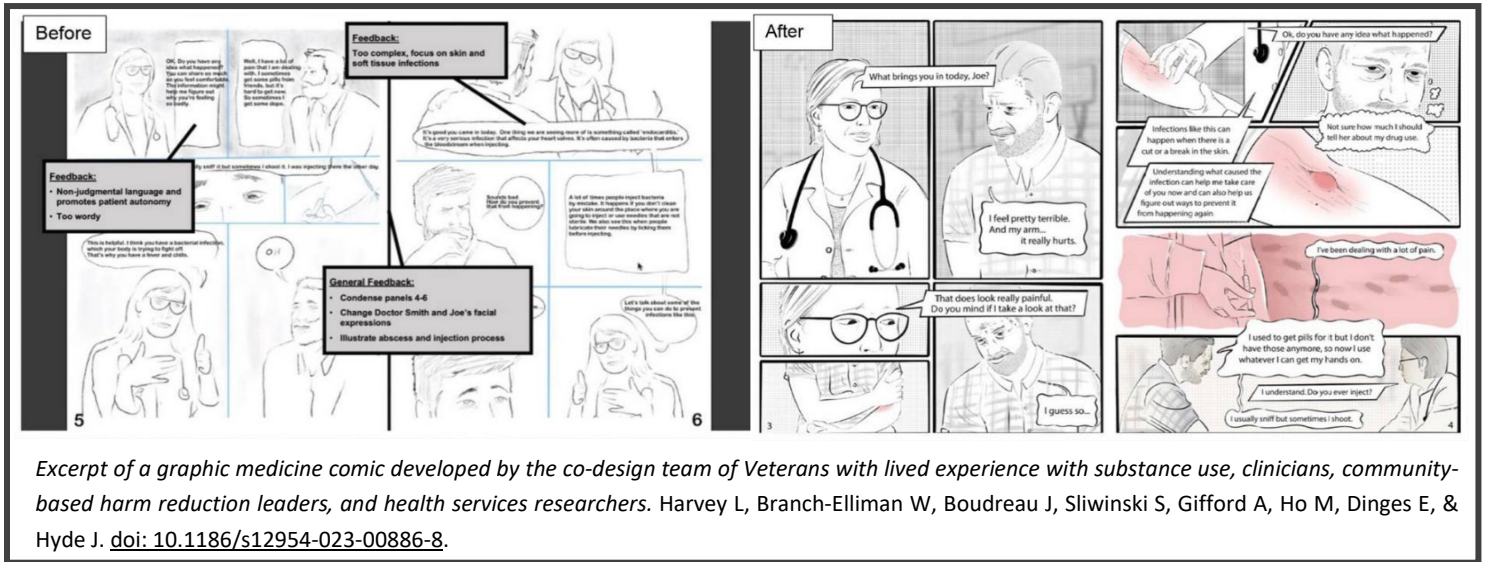
Other active projects:

- Sara is the PI of Peers Enhancing Engagement for Pain Services (PEEPS), an intervention examining the feasibility and accessibility of peer specialists using their lived experience and motivational interviewing skills to support peer patients.
- Sara and colleagues were recently awarded a VHA grant where they will use data from the VOICE trial and EPOCH study to conduct an emulated trial using innovative statistical methods to inform best practices for opioid tapering.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Harm Reduction Stories: Leveraging Graphic Medicine to Engage Veterans In Substance Use Services Within the VA

Harvey L, Branch-Elliman W, Boudreau J, Sliwinski S, Gifford A, Ho M, Dinges E, & Hyde J. **Harm Reduction Stories: Leveraging Graphic Medicine to Engage Veterans in Substance Use Services Within the VA.** *Harm Reduction Journal* Dec 6;20(1):177. doi: [10.1186/s12954-023-00886-8](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-023-00886-8).



In this article, authors discuss the collaborative development of a harm reduction-focused graphic medicine comic that portrays the risks associated with injection drug use and emphasizes patient-centered approaches to educating individuals about risk mitigation strategies. Recognizing the vital role of harm reduction strategies in reducing morbidity and mortality linked with substance use, the authors developed a diverse co-design team consisting of Veterans, clinicians, community-based harm reduction leaders, and health services researchers to create the graphic. Over the course of ten sessions, the team developed a storyline and key messages for the comic, illustrating a fictional clinical scenario where a Veteran with opioid use disorder (OUD) seeks treatment for an injection-related abscess. The comic underscores principles such as patient autonomy, nonjudgmental communication, and strategies for safer use, rather than emphasizing abstinence. Additionally, the article highlights the efficacy of graphic medicine in facilitating patient-centered curriculum on harm reduction, while sharing valuable insights and lessons learned from the co-design team’s developmental phase. Ultimately, the graphic serves as one of several interventions slated for integration into VA facilities, aimed at supporting incorporation of harm reduction principles into care.

Announcements

NEW CORE INFOGRAPHIC AVAILABLE

[Pain/Opioid CORE Infographics Initiative](#) | The newest CORE infographic describes the benefits of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) delivered via telehealth to treat pain. This infographic is based on results from the *Co-Operative Pain Education and Self-Management (COPES)* study and is now available to be viewed and downloaded on our website.

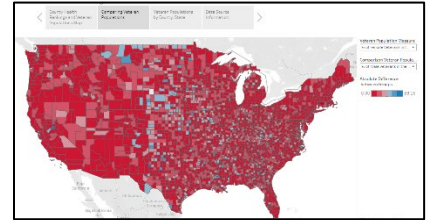


NEW WEBSITE

[Pain and Opioid Use Actively Managed Portfolio \(POU AMP\) Website](#) | The POU AMP website is up and running! Explore information about the POU AMP, including its scope, areas of focus, available funding opportunities, and more.

VA HEALTH EQUITY DATA RESOURCE

[Veterans Geography of Opportunity \(VGO\) Tool - Office of Health Equity](#) | The VGO Tool can be used to explore different factors that influence health in communities where Veterans live, work, and play. This tool uses Veteran population information from the VHA, the American Community Survey, and from [County Health Rankings & Roadmap](#).



Upcoming Events**[Recording now available: HSR Spotlight on Pain Management Series](#)**

Disability Claims as a Pathway to Pain Treatment in Veterans: Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment for Pain Management (SBIRT-PM): Presenters Steve Martino and Marc Rosen describe the use of pain care services among Veterans seeking service-connection for musculoskeletal disorders and an approach to implementing pain care navigation among case managers who work with Veterans recently separated from the military.

[Recording now available: HSR VIREC Good Data Practices Series](#)

Planning for Data for a New Research Protocol: CORE Internal Leadership Committee member, Sara Krein, reviews the importance of planning for data use during the development of a research protocol, including the factors that influence data needs, data questions that need to be answered early in the development process, and planning for data privacy and security in the protocol.

[NAADAC 2024 Annual Conference & Hill Day | October 18 - 23, 2024 | Washington, DC](#)

[Learn, Connect, Advocate, Succeed:](#) NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, represents addiction-focused health care professions in the US, Canada, and abroad. Registration is now open. **Poster presentation abstract submissions are open and will be accepted until May 17, 2024.**

[AMERSA Annual Conference | November 14 - 16, 2024 | Chicago, Illinois](#)

[Empowering Change: From Evidence to Action in Addiction Care and Research:](#) Registration for the AMERSA (Association for Multidisciplinary Education and Research in Substance use and Addiction) conference will open in June. **The call for abstracts, workshops, and awards is now open.**

[23rd Annual Pain Medicine Meeting | November 21 - 23, 2024 | Las Vegas, Nevada](#)

[LET'S GO! Advancing Advocacy and Access:](#) The annual American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine (ASRA) Pain Medicine Meeting will be held this fall. **Abstract submissions will be open April 25 – August 6.**

Pain/Opioid CORE

[More information about the VA Pain/Opioid CORE >>](#)

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