

CSRD January Newsletter

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CLINICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Office of Research & Development

Terri Talks

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Message from the Director

On Friday, January 17, I had the privilege of reviewing the results and evaluations from our Fall round of applications to be considered for funding. Due to the continued “good” budget scenario, CSRD was able to approve Merit studies and Career Development awards at a healthy success rate. We congratulate all of the awardees and will look forward to their being in a highlighted section in the future (see notes below)! We also ask that individuals not having a project approved for funding from this review round to connect with their Scientific Program Officer to discuss their next steps, resubmission, etc.

CSRD Historical Funding Rate:

	<u>Submitted</u>	<u>Funded</u>	<u>% Funded</u>
Fall 2019			
Merit Review	103	25	24%
CADE	24	8	33%
Spring 2019			
Merit Review	103	27	26%
CADE	24	7	29%
Fall 2018			
Merit Review	113	28	25%
CADE	23	11	48%
Spring 2018			
Merit Review	123	31	25%
CADE	32	17	53%
Fall 2017			
Merit Review	126	34	27%
CADE	24	7	29%

Spring 2017

Merit Review	103	22	21%
CADE	15	5	33%

Medical Marijuana Research Update

CSRD recently conducted a survey sent to the research offices to ask about interest and expertise that could contribute to a program of study centered on better understanding benefits and risks of medical marijuana. A total of 151 investigators from almost 50 sites responded. The summary of responses:

Total Individual Investigators	151
Number of VA Medical Centers	48

Health Condition Interest

PTSD	57
Pain	46
Lung Diseases	5
Cancer Associated Symptoms	10
Inflammation	4
Insomnia	5
TBI, Pain, and PTSD	3
Spasticity, Neuropathic Pain Anxiety associated with MS and ALS	3
Alcohol and Opioid Use Disorders	2
Anorexia and Weight Loss	2
Dementia	2
Risks of MI	2
Other	10

Type of Study

Clinical Trial	64
Mechanistic Study	20
Either	5

Role of Interest

Study PI	66
Site PI	41
Other	43

Preclinical	7
Survey or big data mining	3

Next steps are to follow up specifically with two potential teams -- one focused on pain management and one focused on PTSD -- to discuss planning efforts to develop research applications on these two topics.

CSRD CADE Awardee Highlight: Scott Damrauer

CSRD CADE awardee Scott Damrauer, M.D., Philadelphia VA, is involved in the Million Veteran Program genetics work in venous thromboembolism or VTE and peripheral artery disease or PAD. This work has been named in the American Heart Association's list of top heart disease and stroke research advances of 2019. The AHA, one of the top funders of heart- and stroke-related research worldwide, has been compiling an annual list of major advances in heart disease and stroke science since 1996. The biggest victories for 2019 are grouped by the AHA into 10 subject areas. Dr. Damrauer's work falls into the category of Gene Studies Expand Knowledge. Two studies of the human genome offered new insights into VTE, and PAD and were published in *Nature Genetics*. With VTE, which affects 300,000 to 600,000 Americans each year, blood clots start in a vein. This study examined DNA from more than 650,000 people and found 22 new regions of the human genome that correspond with the potentially deadly problem. In people with PAD, there is a narrowing of the peripheral arteries serving the legs, stomach, arms and head. Researchers who tested DNA from more than 637,000 people identified 18 new parts of the genetic code associated with PAD. Additional information and the referenced articles may be accessed by going to:

<https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/scientific-research/aha-names-top-heart-disease-and-stroke-research-advances-of-2019>

CSP 576 is a Top Story of 2019

The *New England Journal of Medicine Journal Watch Psychiatry* has named an *American Journal of Psychiatry* article about CSP 576 (VAST-D study) a top story of 2019. Sidney Zisook, M.D., San Francisco VA, and colleagues reported that a patient's age and hypomanic symptoms may be key indicators for those most likely to benefit from specific, targeted interventions. The researchers studied data from the VA Augmentation and Switching Treatments for Improving Depression Outcomes (VAST-D) study—a trial that examined outcomes in 1,522 Veterans Health Administration patients who received one of three next-step treatments after failing to respond to at least one antidepressant treatment: a switch to sustained-release bupropion, a combination of the current medication with sustained-release bupropion, or augmentation of the current medication with the antipsychotic aripiprazole. The analysis revealed that augmentation with aripiprazole was more effective for patients aged 65 years and older compared with the bupropion regimens. In contrast, for patients with severe mixed hypomanic symptoms,

augmentation with aripiprazole or the current treatment combined with bupropion was more effective than switching to bupropion. For additional information, please see:

<http://alert.psychnews.org/>

Lung Cancer Work to be Highlighted

A recent Career Development Award graduate, Medhi Wangpaichitr, Ph.D., is now an independent investigator at the Miami VA and will have his work highlighted in the January issue of *Molecular Cancer Research*. This journal is published by the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR). Lung cancer deaths in the United States exceed those of the next four major cancers combined and lung cancer is one of the most common cancers found in the VA Healthcare System. On average, 448 people a day will die of lung cancer in the U.S. Certain lung tumors are difficult to treat because they resist therapies such as cisplatin that aim to disrupt the replication and growth of tumor cells. Dr. Wangpaichitr's lab at the Miami VA has found certain mechanisms of resistance may stem from the way these cancer cells obtain energy or their metabolism. This finding is important in lung cancer particularly for patients who develop resistance to cisplatin therapy because it makes a connection between how energy production inside the cell affects the outside environment surrounding the tumor. In this environment, the body's own immune cells play a role in attacking and limiting the growth of tumors. These data in lung cancer cells resistant to cisplatin add to clinical considerations in lung cancer management, specifically how a subset of patients should be managed relying on potential metabolic biomarkers. Furthermore, these data support the possibility of improving clinical trials for lung cancer based on immunotherapy. The article may be accessed at:

<https://mcr.aacrjournals.org/content/18/1/105>

LOI Webinar held; Slides Available

CSRD held a webinar on January 7 for applicants and their research offices that had approved merit clinical trial letters of intent (LOI) for the Spring 2020 review round. For those invited to the webinar, a copy of the presentation was uploaded to the calendar invite after the meeting. For others interested in a copy of this presentation, please email the clinical trials mailbox at clin-review@va.gov.

CSRD Staff Highlight: Lucindia Shouse

Lucindia Shouse has been with CSRD since 2013, bringing her IRB and human subjects regulatory expertise to her role as Central Office contact for CSRD's centralized Data Monitoring Committee. She also manages federal records as an ORD records liaison and leads a records management workgroup.

Meet and Greet Us:

Please note one place CSRD staff will be over the next few weeks:

- American Society of Clinical Oncology Genitourinary Cancers Symposium, San Francisco, February 13-15