



# VISN 6 Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Post Deployment Mental Health



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## Update on the MIRECC Research Fellows

**Dr. Sushma Roberts**, MIRECC Psychology Fellow, has accepted a full time staff psychologist position in the VA Maryland Health Care System. Dr. Roberts was highly productive during her fellowship and pursued interests surrounding posttraumatic stress disorder and psychological intervention including projects examining the efficacy of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) among OIF/OEF veterans with PTSD.



She has presented her work at numerous conferences such as International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, Health Services Research and Development, and Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies. She will be leaving Durham at the end of December to continue this work at the Trauma Recovery Program at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. In addition to her clinical and training responsibilities, Dr. Roberts plans to continue an active research career with a clinical faculty appointment at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

“We are all very excited for Sushma. While there is strong empirical support for exposure based therapies for the treatment of PTSD, many clinicians fail to implement them and often cite relatively high drop out rates associated with exposure treatment as a factor. Dr. Roberts’ work with ACT incorporates the use of values, mindfulness, and behavior activation techniques and is very promising in this regard. I look forward to seeing the results of her work as she continues her career in Baltimore” notes Psychology Fellowship Director, Dr. Patrick Calhoun. “It is a real strength of the fellowship program, that we are retaining outstanding young psychologists like Dr. Roberts in the VA.”

### Welcome to our new Fellows

We are delighted to announce that we have four new MIRECC Fellows.

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## “Face of the New Veteran” Employee Training

**Kristy Straits-Troster, PhD** and **Debra Volkmer, MSW** have taken the “Face of the New Veteran” on the road! After nineteen well received live presentations of this program at Durham VAMC, this team revised the program into a “train the trainer” format and presented the updated version at Salisbury VAMC in early December, 2006. Negotiations are continuing to disseminate the program through EES and VA learning catalog.

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## Welcome to the new MIRECC Research Fellows

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**Scott D. McDonald, PhD**, recently completed his doctoral training in clinical psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Prior to his graduate training, Scott developed an interest in neuroimaging as a research assistant on studies of cocaine craving and "simulated deception" at the University of Pennsylvania. At VCU Scott pursued an interest in anxiety disorders and examined cognitive and trait vulnerabilities to fears and phobias for his dissertation project. While in Richmond, Scott also enjoyed a clinical practicum at McGuire VAMC's Polytrauma/Brain Injury Program.



Prior to joining the MIRECC, Scott attended internship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, completing several neuropsychology rotations as well as a rewarding clinical rotation in the Birmingham VAMC's PTSD clinic. Scott's current research interests broadly involve the relationship between psychopathology and cognitive functioning with a particular focus on PTSD and other anxiety disorders. In the clinic Scott is looking forward to providing time-limited, empirically-supported treatment for OIF/OEF veterans with PTSD and associated symptoms.

**Jasmeet Pannu Hayes, PhD**, received her PhD in Clinical Psychology at the University of Arizona. Prior to joining the MIRECC, she completed a clinical internship

with an emphasis in neuropsychology at the Boston VAMC/Harvard Medical School. Jasmeet's current research focus is examining the neural correlates of memory and attention processes in patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) utilizing functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)



methodology. This line of research has implications for understanding the effect of emotion and anxiety on memory, as well as the putative cognitive and neural mechanisms involved in behavioral treatments for PTSD. In line with her interest in brain and behavior relationships, her clinical program focuses on neuropsychological assessment of various neurological and psychiatric populations.

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## OIF/OEF Veteran Needs Assessment

Earlier this year, the MIRECC contracted with Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI) to develop and conduct a needs assessment of returning OIF/OEF veterans and their families. The MIRECC Clinical Component (Kristy Straits-Troster, PhD - project lead, Everett Jones, MD, Harold Kudler, MD) and Health Services Research Core (Pat Calhoun, PhD) worked with SRBI to develop an initial series of focus groups to

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## Publications

Clancy CP, Graybeal A, Tompson WP, Badgett KS, Feldman ME, Calhoun PS, Erkanli A, Hertzberg MA, Beckham JC. Lifetime trauma exposure in veterans with military-related posttraumatic stress disorder: association with current symptomatology. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2006 Sep;67(9):1346-53.

Marx CE, Trost WT, Shampine LJ, Stevens RD, Hulette CM, Steffens DC, Ervin JF, Butterfield MI, Blazer DG, Massing MW, Lieberman JA. The Neurosteroid Allopregnanolone is Reduced in Prefrontal Cortex in Alzheimer's Disease, *Biological Psychiatry*, 2006 Dec 15;60(12):1287-94.

Hurley RA, Fisher R, Taber KH. Sudden Onset Panic: Epileptic Aura or Panic Disorder? *J Neuropsychiatry Clin Neurosci* 2006 Fall; 18(4):436-43

## MIRECC Symposium at the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Meeting

November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

### *Health Risk Behaviors and Combat Stress: Implications for a New Generation of Veterans*

#### Overview:

Combat veterans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan (OIF/OEF) are at increased risk for post-deployment risky health behaviors which may impact subsequent health and healthcare utilization. Findings from VA national clinical outreach efforts and pilot interventions implemented in the VA Mid-Atlantic Network were presented for discussion.

*Survey of Self-Reported Health Risks Among OIF/OEF Veterans in VA* Straits-Tröster KA, Calhoun PS, Jones EJ, Butterfield MI, Kudler H.

*Prevalence of Alcohol Misuse, Smoking, and Health Complaints Among Recently Returning Veterans with PTSD* Calhoun PS, Beckham JC, Collie CF, Yates B, Watkins SD, Dennis MF.

*Telephone Quit Line Tobacco Cessation for Veterans Returning from Iraq: A Clinical Demonstration Project* Beckham JC, McFall M, Drury P, Braxton L, Straits-Tröster KA, Kudler H, Hamlett-Berry K.

#### Discussant:

**Kim Hamlett-Berry, PhD**

Director, VA Public Health Policy and Prevention

## Welcome to the new MIRECC Research Fellows

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**Victoria Payne, MD, MS**, completed her Masters of Science in Statistics at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. She received her MD from Wake Forest University School of Medicine. Dr. Payne completed her Residency in Psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center, where she served as a Chief Resident at the Durham VA. She went on to complete a fellowship in Clinical Psychopharmacology Research at Duke University Medical Center.

Dr. Payne's research interests include mood and anxiety disorders. Currently, she is involved in analyzing neurosteroid profiles in OEF/OIF veterans with and without psychiatric disorders. This research is pertinent to psychiatric evaluation and treatment of veterans, including those with a history of traumatic brain injury.



**Rohan Calnaido, MD**, received a Bachelors of Science from Florida State University. He completed his MD at the University of Florida School of Medicine. Dr. Calnaido finished a residency in Psychiatry in the Duke University Health System. His research interest lies in the comorbidity of mental illness and chronic pain

Dr. Calnaido's present research focuses on the correlation of pain and cognitive and emotional states. He currently has projects in the neuroimaging core examining differences in the brain activation of chronic low back pain patients related to coping skills training. In addition, he is examining the psychometric results of the MIRECC registry database and correlating them to pain ratings.



### Community Outreach

**Katherine Taber, PhD** (Assistant Co Director, Education) has accepted an invitation to serve on the Brain Injury Association of North Carolina's Board of Directors.

## Invited Lectures

On October 4, **Dr. Christine Marx (Associate Director - Interventions Research Core)** presented "*Neurosteroids and Alzheimer's Disease*" at Neurology Grand Rounds, Duke University School of Medicine.

On October 5, **Dr. Katherine Taber (Assistant Co Director, Education)** presented "*Windows to the Brain: Neurobiology of Traumatic Brain Injury*" and on October 6, **Dr. Robin Hurley (Co Director, Education)** presented "*Windows to the Brain: Neuropsychiatry of Traumatic Brain Injury*" as part of Research Recognition Days at the Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine in Blacksburg, VA.

On October 11, **Dr. Taber and Dr. Hurley** presented a joint seminar on traumatic brain injury at the Institute for Soldier Nanotechnology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

**Dr. Raj Morey (Associate Director - Neuroimaging Research Core)** participated as part of the Career Development Panel's presentation "*K Awards: The Ins and Outs of Career Development Grants*" at the Conference on Innovations in Trauma Research Methods, November 3 - 4, West Hollywood, CA.

**Dr. Hurley** presented "*Windows to the Brain: Traumatic Brain Injury Information for Primary Care Providers*" to the Readjustment Counseling Services (New York Metropolitan Area) on November 7 and as part of VISN 3 Clinical Management of Common Mental Health Issues in Primary Care Conference on November 8.

On November 10, **Dr. Hurley** presented "*Blast Related Non-Penetrating Brain Injury: Neuropsychiatric Implications*" at Blast and IED: Health Effects and Injury Mitigations Symposium sponsored by Defence Research and Development Canada.

On December 18, **Dr. Taber** presented "*Traumatic Brain Injury: Neurobiology and Neuroimaging*" at the Department of Computer Science, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

### "Face of the New Veteran" Employee Training

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The "*Face of the New Veteran*" is 1-hour staff education program designed to teach VA staff about the unique characteristics of OIF/OEF veterans in order to help VA staff best assist these veterans and their families. The educational product consisted of a custom photo montage, description of veteran demographics, healthcare services eligibility, clinical video vignettes of service members addressing VA healthcare providers, and resource lists for distribution. The program has sensitized VA staff to OIF/OEF veterans' needs and promoted improved customer service

## Recent Presentations

**Calhoun PS, Becker ME, Boggs C, Troster KS, Strauss JL.** *Quality of Life, Medication Adherence, and Health Service Use of Women with Depression and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Calhoun PS, Beckham JC, Collie CF, Yates B, Watkins SD, Dennis MF.** *Prevalence of Alcohol Misuse, Smoking, and Health Complaints Among Recently Returning Veterans with PTSD.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Calhoun PS, Boggs C, Straits-Troster K, Becker ME, Strauss JL.** *PTSD Mediates the Relationship between Trauma and Health Service Use in Women with Depression.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Calhoun PS, Crawford EC, Braxton LB, Beckham JC.** *Validity of the Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI) Aggression Scales in Veterans with PTSD.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Calhoun PS, Dennis MF, Beckham JC.** *Emotional Reactivity to Trauma Stimuli and Duration of Past Smoking Cessation Attempts in Smokers with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Jones EJ, Straits-Troster KA, Kudler H.** *Strategies in the Service of New Combat Veterans: The VA Mid-Atlantic Network's MIRECC Clinical Core.* Association of Medical Service Corps Offices of the Navy (AMSCON) 14th Annual Poster Session during the 112th Annual Meeting of the American Military Surgeons of the United States meeting, November 5 - 10, San Antonio, TX.

**Polusny MA, Ries BJ, Calhoun PS, Schultz JR, Clemenson L, Johnsen IR.** *PTSD Symptom Clusters Associated with Physical Health and Health Care Utilization in Rural Primary Care Patients Exposed to Natural Disaster.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Roberts S, Dennis MF, Calhoun PS, Yeats B, Beckham JC.** *Association between Interpersonal Violence, PTSD, & Depression in Women & Their Significant Others.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Straits-Troster KA, Calhoun, PS, Jones EJ, Butterfield MI, Kudler H.** *Survey of Self-Reported Health Risks Among OIF/OEF Veterans in VA.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

**Straits-Troster KA, Calhoun, PS, Butterfield MI, Boggs C, Strauss J, Dominitz J.** *PTSD and Hepatitis C Infection: Association with Quality of Life and Health Behaviors.* 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, November 4 - 7, 2006, Hollywood, CA

## Noon V-tel Lecture Schedule:

### January 12

Debra Volkmer, LCSW (Salisbury VA)  
*Neurobiology of Traumatic Brain Injury*

### February 9

COL Anthony E. Baker, Sr. PhD (Chief, Family Programs, National Guard Bureau Joint Staff)  
*National Guard Bureau Family Program*

### March 9

Dr. John P. Oliver (Chief, Chaplain Service)  
*Engaging VA and Community Resources for Healing: Models for Seamless Coordination of Pastoral Care for Veterans and Their Families*

This series is presented by V-tel and telephone conferences. Web-casting will become available in the near future. If any of you have suggestions or ideas for lectures or for the series process, please feel free to contact Dr. Robin Hurley or Dr. Katherine Taber with your feedback.

Below are the [V-tel phone numbers](#) to dial to participate in the series for the calendar year 2006. Dial in at starts at 11:45 am Eastern Time.

VISN 6 Office	304 262-3950	Hampton 5th Floor	304 262-3930
Asheville	304 262-3952	Richmond	304 262-3951
Beckley	304 260-4839	Salem	304 262-3942
Durham	304 262-3924	Salisbury	304 262-3948
Fayetteville	304 262-3928	CBOC Jacksonville	304-260-4809

There are ten audio lines scheduled. For [audio lines only](#) call: 800-767-1750 and inform the operator that you are calling in for the "V6 PD Mental Health Problems"

## OIF/OEF Veteran Needs Assessment

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be followed by a mail out survey of OIF/OEF veterans living in VISN 6 with hopes of replicating the mail-out survey at the national level in partnership with other VA offices if approved. Six post-deployment focus groups with 11-15 participants each were conducted: 2 groups of Active Duty, separated OIF/OEF veterans; 2 groups of National Guard OIF/OEF veterans; 1 group of spouses only, and; 1 group of female OIF/OEF veterans only. Sampling strategy included random selection of invitees among all eligible OIF/OEF veterans residing within a 2-hour drive of the MIRECC seat in Durham, NC.

Many of the veterans seen had not yet received VA services. Information solicited from the groups included: health/mental health concerns during and post deployment, kinds of services utilized and satisfaction with services, and barriers and preferences for services and information related to post deployment health. SRBI has now completed the Focus Group Report and forwarded the results so that this MIRECC team, together with our contractor, can begin the mailed survey stage of our plan. Project results will guide the development and implementation of clinical services, policies and research for OIF/OEF veterans in VISN 6 and will have national relevance for our VHA and DoD collaborators.