



# VISN 6 Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Post Deployment Mental Health



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## Announcements

### New MIRECC Fellowship sites!

Two of our sites - Richmond and Salisbury - responded to a recent opportunity to submit proposals for MIRECC Fellowship programs. Both proposals were successful, so our MIRECC will soon have Fellows at three sites!

MIRECC Fellows spend about 25% of their time providing clinical services directly to Veterans and about 75% of their time in research and educational activities. These new fellowships will increase and enhance collaborations between MIRECC sites and promote joint projects with our academic affiliates.

### Richmond VAMC site

#### Directors:

**Physician Fellowship** - Robert Schneider, MD, FACP

**Allied Health Fellowship** - Treven Pickett, PhD, ABPP

**Collaborating Academic Institution:** Virginia Commonwealth U

### Salisbury VAMC site

#### Directors:

**Psychiatry Fellowship** - Robin A. Hurley, MD, FANPA  
Donald Eknoyan, MD

**Psychology Fellowship** - Ruth Yoash-Gantz, Psy.D, ABPP-CN

**Collaborating Academic Institution:** Wake Forest U

## Update on MIRECC Research Fellows

We are extremely pleased to announce that **Dr. Jasmeet Pannu Hayes** has accepted a faculty appointment in Duke's Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Pannu Hayes will continue her innovative research program as part of the Neuroimaging Core of the MIRECC and in close collaboration with Duke-UNC's Brain Imaging and Analysis Center.



During her two-year tenure she authored five scientific articles and made four presentations at national meetings, with one more scheduled (at the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies meeting next November).

Her research examines the neural circuitry of emotion and cognition in PTSD, particularly in combat veterans returning from the current wars. This research utilizes fMRI

(functional magnetic resonance imaging) to characterize neural activity underlying symptoms of PTSD. These symptoms include problems with attention, concentration and memory, as well as hypervigilance and arousal. An important aspect of her work involves understanding the neural circuitry of emotion regulation that may contribute to the development of new approaches to treatment.

## Recently Approved Grants

**Calhoun PS Supplemental Nicotine Administration for Smoking Cessation in PTSD** National Cancer Institute

## Presentations from our MIRECC:



Simonds-Bisbee EC, Collie C, Clancy C, Beckham JC, Yeatts B, Calhoun PS. *Comparing MMPI-2 Restructured Clinical Scales in African American and Caucasian Veterans evaluated for PTSD*. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality Assessment, Chicago IL, March 4-8, 2009

## New MIRECC Researcher

Elizabeth Selgrade is a new Health Science Specialist in the MIRECC Neuroimaging Core. She is a recent graduate from NC State University, where she earned degrees in Biomedical Engineering and Science, Technology, and Society. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, participating in service projects, making jewelry, and sewing.



## Publications

Calhoun PS, Wiley M, Dennis MF, Beckham JC. *Self-reported health and physician diagnosed illnesses in women with posttraumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder*. Journal of Trauma Stress. 2009;22(2):122-130.

Dennis MF, Flood AM, Reynolds V, Araujo G, Clancy CP, Barefoot JC, Beckham JC. *Evaluation of lifetime trauma exposure and physical health in women with posttraumatic stress disorder or major depressive disorder*. Violence Against Women. 2009;15(5):618-27.

Drury P, Calhoun PS, Boggs C, Araujo G, Yeatts B, Dennis MF, Beckham JC. *Influences of Comorbid Disorders on Personality Assessment Inventory Profiles in Women with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment 2009;31: 119-128.

Eggleston AM, Straits-Tröster K, Kudler H. *Substance Use Treatment Needs Among Recent Veterans*. North Carolina Medical Journal 2009; 70(1): 54-58.

Pannu Hayes J, LaBar KS, Petty CM, McCarthy G, Morey RA. Alterations in the neural circuitry for emotion and attention associated with posttraumatic stress symptomatology. Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging. 2009 172(1):7-15.

## Invited Lectures

**Dr. Robin Hurley (Associate Director, Education)** presented "*Windows to the Brain: PTSD and TBI*" at Grand Rounds for the Department of Psychiatry, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston-Salem NC, April 17, 2009. Dr. Hurley presented "*TBI in Time of War: Implications for the Basic Scientist*" at the Institute for Rehabilitative Medicine, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem NC, April 21, 2009.

## Book Chapters

Kilts, JD, Naylor, JC, Payne, VM, Strauss JL, Calhoun, PS, Marx CE. Chemical Messengers, In: Textbook of Geriatric Psychiatry, 4th Edition. Blazer, DG, Steffens, D, Eds. American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.; Arlington, VA 2009, pp 95-118

Strauss JL, Marx CE, Calhoun PS. Guided imagery as a therapeutic tool in PTSD. In: Neurobiology of PTSD. Shiromani P, Keane T, LeDoux J, eds. Humana Press, Inc; Totowa, NJ 2009, pp 363-374

## In the News!



**DukeHealth.org**

Connect with your health care at Duke Medicine

April 1, 2009

**Excerpts from "Novel Treatment May Provide Relief for People with Schizophrenia"**

**By Duke Medicine News and Communications**

A compound that naturally occurs in the brain and other areas of the body may be a promising new treatment for the most severe and disruptive symptoms of schizophrenia, ... Researchers conducted a pilot study at the Durham VAMC that suggests the neurosteroid pregnenolone targets symptoms of schizophrenia for which no treatment options are available. ... negative symptoms, such as apathy, lack of emotion and poor social functioning, and cognitive symptoms, which include memory impairment and difficulty concentrating and completing tasks.

"If replicated through further research, pregnenolone could provide a novel treatment for the cognitive and negative symptoms in schizophrenia, which severely impact the daily lives of patients," says Christine Marx, M.D., M.A., lead author of the study and associate professor of psychiatry.

... Prior research had found that pregnenolone enhanced learning and memory in rodents while also influencing the function of brain receptors associated with schizophrenia. Pregnenolone is present in varying levels in humans but not much was known about how it was regulated.

... Patients taking pregnenolone had more than 20 percent improvement on a test used to calculate negative symptoms compared to the placebo

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**In the News!**

Durham, Chapel Hill and the Research Triangle Region

March 20, 2009

**Excerpts from**  
**"VA doctor: Post-traumatic stress disorder affects the whole family"**  
 by Gregory Childress

.... Kudler ... spent a little time on the set of Sesame Street this week. As associate director of Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center...Kudler was particularly interested in the taping of a segment titled "Coming Home." The 30-minute program ... tells stories about service members who return home with injuries, both visible and invisible, and explores families' struggle to find a "new normal."

... Kudler specializes in those invisible injuries that cause post-traumatic stress disorder, an anxiety disorder that may develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which a soldier is physically harmed or threatened. ... Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, trouble falling or staying asleep, anger and hypervigilance, which can to difficulty keeping a job and maintaining relationships.

*"That's why Sesame Street is so good: It connects with people on the level of their families, and it makes these problems not problems of mental illness and bad brains or whatever. It makes them problems of families and problems of living,"* Kudler said on Thursday.

... Kudler said VA and military efforts today are more focused on preventing PTSD and other mental disorders from occurring in soldiers.

*"If we can intervene with this generation from the beginning, ... if we can catch them early on when they're home and work with them and support their families, can we change the trajectory and prevent the kind of family conflict, the stress, not just on the veterans themselves, but their spouses, their children and their parents, the problems on the job site, the unemployment ..."*

... Kudler noted that soldiers in the National Guard and those in the reserves suffer PTSD at almost twice the rate of regular service members. He said the reasons vary but include the fact that reservists and guardsmen are often isolated from the military after returning home.

... Kudler said it's important to acknowledge the resiliency of the men and women who have witnessed the atrocities of war. In fact, he said the single biggest issue for many of them is grief.

*"Every soldier who loses a buddy believes that they must have done something wrong,"* Kudler said. *"It's not that they're all crazy with PTSD, they're in grief and sometimes it's hard to separate grief from PTSD."*

Kudler said spouses and the community can help reduce the odds of a loved one experiencing PTSD by giving returning combat troops plenty of support.

**In the News!**

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group. Tests used to assess cognitive impairment point to improvements in the pregnenolone group. Patients with the lowest natural levels of the neurosteroid reported the most significant improvements on memory and concentration tasks.

*"While pregnenolone is available as a dietary supplement, there have been extremely few studies of this compound in the last 50 years,"* Marx explains. The researchers caution that the pregnenolone used in the study was carefully monitored and met FDA standards for purity, unlike supplements available over the counter.

*"Drug development for mental health disorders has been moving at a glacial pace and we are in desperate need of new and novel treatments,"* said Jeffrey A. Lieberman, M.D., study co-author and chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center and director of the New York State Psychiatric Institute. *"This small, proof of concept study represents a potentially major advance."*

... This work was supported by the VA Mid-Atlantic Mental Illness, Research, Education, and Clinical Center, National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Affective Disorders, and NIH and VA Career Development Awards.

**Outreach to Community Providers**

## Traumatic Brain Injury Invisible Wounds of War

Working with Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan  
and Their Families

**2009****Fayetteville - May 5****Greenville - June 3****Wilmington - June 4****Area L AHEC - June 10****Raleigh - June 11****Sponsored by:**

NC Citizen Soldier Support Program,  
Carolinas Rehabilitation and the NC AHEC



## Resources for Families

[www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc](http://www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc)

## Military Families Cope with Change

[www.pbs.org/parents/cominghome/](http://www.pbs.org/parents/cominghome/)

**Coming Home**  **Military Families Cope with Change**

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6>

Military personnel are deeply affected by their war experiences. Adjustment difficulties are common. These are normal reactions to abnormal experiences. Our materials cover some of the issues that are common following deployment.

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/readustment-issues-veteran.asp>

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/veterans.asp>

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/families.asp>

## Resources for Providers

[www.aheconnect.com/citizensoldier](http://www.aheconnect.com/citizensoldier)



Click on **New Users** to register. Then you will see the available web courses listed:

*Treating the Invisible Wounds of War*

*ICARE: What Primary Care Providers Need to Know About Mental Health Issues Facing Returning Service Members and Their Families*

### **CME** Partnering in Support of War Zone Veterans and Their Families

Harold Kudler, MD and Kristy Straits-Tröster, PhD  
*Psychiatric Annals* 2009 39(2):64-70

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6>

Military personnel are deeply affected by their war experiences. Adjustment difficulties are common. These are normal reactions to abnormal experiences. Our materials cover some of the issues that are common following deployment.

[www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/community.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/community.asp)

[www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/readustment-issues-provider.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/readustment-issues-provider.asp)

[www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/readustment-issues-clergy.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/readustment-issues-clergy.asp)

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an area of particular emphasis for us.

[www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/TBI\\_education.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/TBI_education.asp)

## Noon V-tel Lecture Schedule:

### May 8

Brad Schaffer (Cincinnati VAMC) & Dr. Gary Dick (U Cincinnati)

*"Interpersonal Partner Violence (IPV) and Veterans: Program Development and Outcomes"*

### June 12

Michelle D Sherman (Oklahoma City VAMC)

*"What about the kids? Rationale and resources for supporting teens of parents who have experienced trauma"*

### July 10

No lecture

This series is presented by V-tel and audio conferences. We are having increasing participation from sites outside VISN 6, so our assigned numbers may change. The number that each VISN 6 site will use to dial in will be included in an email notification prior to each presentation.

If you wish to attend from a site outside of VISN 6, please contact Mary Peoples (mary.peoples1@va.gov; 704-638-9000 ext 2956) so she can make the necessary arrangements.