

# BRIEFINGS

*The latest news and updates from the Mid-Atlantic MIRECC*



## Director's Update



This fall, MIRECC Core and Laboratory leaders spent a half-day retreat in Kernersville sharing our collective accomplishments and outlining future Center goals. I am thrilled to report that in FY 23, VISN 6 MIRECC investigators enjoyed great success with both intramural and extramural grant funding and we welcomed many new VA Career Development Awardees and first time Merit Awardees.

Additionally, our mission to enhance post-deployment mental health and wellness for our Nation's Veterans and their families has extended to include subject matter expertise in Veteran Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and a developing focus on mental health and aging. Our genetics laboratory is using 'big data' to identify key genetic predictors of suicide and our interventions and metabolomics laboratory is conducting medication trials for the treatment of multiple mental health disorders. Our imaging laboratory identified multiple genetic markers that influence the volume of emotion-regulation centers in the brain and our health services research lab is conducting multiple clinical trials to examine the clinical effectiveness of mobile contingency management for smoking and alcohol use disorder. Our neuroscience lab continues to evaluate the relationship between neuropeptides and fear with an expanding interest in post-traumatic epilepsy and toxic exposures. In addition, our Education Core continues to integrate the latest technologies to improve education and clinical outcomes and our Clinical Core is supporting multiple programs and projects to increase available services to Veterans and their families.

A huge congratulations and sincere gratitude to our Center leaders and staff for the innovative and impactful work they do every day. We are making differences in the lives of so many Veterans and their families.

*Jennifer C. Naylor, PhD*

Director, Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC

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## FOCUS ON THE VISN

## NEWS



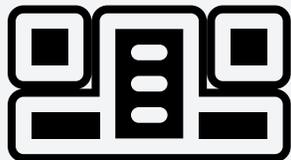
## GRANTS



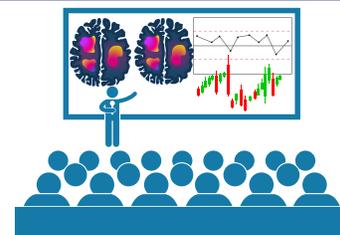
★ **Bjork, James, PhD.** Understanding Motivational Biases to Promote Opioid Tapering in Chronic Pain Patients. DoD/CDMRP Project HT94252310645 Project period: 7/15/2023-7/14/2025 Direct Costs: \$250,000 Role: Principal Investigator. The goal of this project is to utilize remote neurobehavioral testing technology to collect and computationally model decision-making about risk under ambiguity in Veterans who continue using prescribed opioid analgesics for chronic pain despite provider preferences. This study aims to understand covert motivational biases of these patients, to better inform providers on how to frame the prospect of opioid tapering.

★ **Marx, Chris E., MD, Naylor, Jennifer C., Ph.D.** Multiple Principal Investigators. A New Intervention to Improve Function in Veterans with Anxiety and Depression. Funding agency: VA Rehabilitation Research & Development. Grant type: Merit Review. Duration: (2024-2028) Multiple PIs: Jennifer C. Naylor, PhD and Chris E. Marx, MD

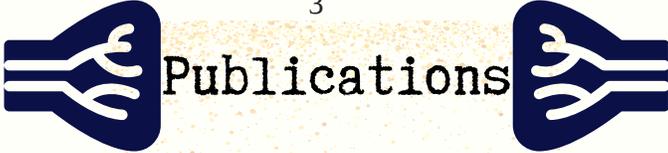
## RESEARCH



## EDUCATION AND DISSEMINATION

Scientific Posters, Invited Lectures,  
Presentations and Trainings

- Ashley-Koch, A.E., Garrett, B.L., Kyle, B., Daniel, H., Qing, Y., P., Tanabe, N. S., Charity, O., Nathan, K., Jean, B., Marilyn, J., Telen, M. K. and the MIRECC Workgroup. (November, 2023).** African Americans with Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) demonstrate accelerated epigenetic aging compared to African Americans without SCD. American Society of Human Genetics Annual Meeting, Washington, DC. (Scientific Poster)
- Lee, Y., Polick, C.S., Dennis, P., Calhoun, P., Braley, T.J., Wilson, S. (October, 2023).** Investigating disparities in smoking cessation treatment for veterans with Multiple Sclerosis: A national analysis. Nicotine & Tobacco Science Conference, Durham, NC. (Scientific Presentation)
- Martindale, S.L. (September, 2023).** Long-Term Effects of Mild TBI and Blast Exposure in Combat Veterans, 2023 NICOE Education Webinar Series. (Webinar)
- Nieuwsma, J.A. (August, 2023).** The ABCs of Moral Injury: Antecedents, birth of a construct, and clinical considerations. Johns Hopkins Social Work Service (Webinar).
- Nieuwsma, J.A., Brown, L., and Parker, R. (September, 2023).** Suicidality and the spirit: A suicide prevention training for community clergy. Durham VA Healthcare System, Durham, NC. (Lecture)
- Polick, C.S., Darwish, H., Pestillo de Olivera, L., Watson, A., Nickenig Vissoci, J., Calhoun, P.S., Connell, C.M., Ploutz-Snyder, R., Braley, T.J., Stoddard, S.A. (October, 2023).** Pathways from lifetime stressors to MS severity: SEM through resilience, smoking, sleep, and mental health. National Clinician Scholar Program (NCSP) Annual Conference hosted by Yale University, New Haven, CT. (Podium session)
- Smigelsky, M., Nieuwsma, J., Buechner, B., and Torres, T. (September, 2023).** Moral Injury. John P. Mayhugh Foundation Hero's Journey Symposium, Washington, DC. (Panel Discussion)
- Wells, S. Y., Wachsmann, T., Gomez, R., Knopp, K., Dillon, K. H., Glassman, L. H., Mackintosh, M. A., & Morland, L. (November, 2023).** Examining Changes in Anger Following Couples-based PTSD Treatments. 57th annual meeting of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Seattle, WA. (Scientific Poster)
- Wortmann, J.H. and Smigelsky, M. (July, 2023).** Moral Injury in Healthcare. Ascension Saint Thomas Hospital, virtual. (Staff Training)



# Publications

## Book Chapters:

Walter, K.H., Wells, S. Y., Walker, H. E., and Gomez, R. M. (in press). Treating Military Personnel and Veterans with Cognitive Processing Therapy. In T. Galovski and J. S. Wachen (Eds), Cognitive Processing Therapy for Complex Cases - Evidence-based Strategies. Berlin, Germany: Springer Nature.

## Scientific Articles:

Evans, W.R., Smigelsky, M.A., Frankfurt, S.B., Antal, C.J., Yeomans, P.D., Check, C., and Bhatt-Mackin, S.M. (in press). Emerging interventions for moral injury: Expanding pathways to moral healing. Current Treatment Options in Psychiatry.

King, H.A., Perry, K.R., Ferguson, S., Hicken, B.L., Jackson, G.L., Lynch, C., Woolson, S.L., Wortmann, J.H., Nieuwsma, J.A., and Parry, K.J. (2023). Identifying potentially morally injurious events from the veteran perspective: A qualitative descriptive study. Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh-2022-0049>

López-Ojeda, W. & Hurley, R.A. (in press). Vaping and The Brain: Effects of Electronic Cigarette and Their Components. J Neuropsychiatry Clin Neurosc.

MacDonald, H. Z., Franz, M. R., Pless Kaiser, A., Lee, L. O., Lawrence, A. E., Fairbank, J. A., and Vasterling, J. J. (2023). Associations of Warzone Veteran and Intimate Partner PTSD Symptoms with Child Depression, Anxiety, Hyperactivity, and Conduct Problems. Military Behavioral Health. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2023.2246894>

McGeary, C. A., Morland, L. A., Resick, P. A., Straud, C. L., Moring, J. C., Sohn, M. J., Mackintosh, M.-A., Young-McCaughan, S., Acierno, R., Rauch, S. A. M., Mintz, J., McGeary, D. D., Wells, S. Y., Grubbs, K., Nabity, P. S., McMahon, C. J., Litz, B. T., Velligan, D. I., Macdonald, A., Mata-Galan, E., Holliday, S. L., Dillon, K. H., Roache, J. D., and Peterson, A. L. (2023). Impact and efficiency of treatment across two PTSD clinical trials comparing in-person and telehealth service delivery formats. Psychological Services. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000774>

Nabity, P. S., McMahon, C. J., Litz, B. T., Velligan, D. I., Macdonald, A., Mata-Galan, E., Holliday, S. L., Dillon, K. H., Roache, J. D., and Peterson, A. L. (2023). Impact and efficiency of treatment across two PTSD clinical trials comparing in-person and telehealth service delivery formats. Psychological Services. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000774>

Nievergelt, C.M., Maihofer, A.X., Atkinson, E.G., Chen, C.Y., Choi, K.W., Coleman, J.R., Daskalakis, N.P., Duncan, L.E., Polimanti, R., Aaronson, C., Amstadter, A.B., Andersen S.B., Andreassen, O.A., Arbisi, P.A., Ashley-Koch, A.E., Austin, S.B., Avdibegović, E., Babic, D., Bacanu, S.A., Baker, D.G., Batzler, A., Beckham, J.C., et al., (2023). Discovery of 95 PTSD loci provides insight into genetic architecture and neurobiology of trauma and stress-related disorders. Nature Genetics. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2023.08.31.23294915>

Shepherd-Banigan, M., Shapiro, A., Stechuchak, K.M., Glynn, S., Calhoun, P., Ackland, P.E., Bokhour, B., Edelman, D., Falkovic, M., Weidenbacher, J.H., Eldridge, M.E., Lanford, T., Swinkels, C., Dedert, E., Wells, S.Y., Ruffin, R., Van Houtven, C.H. (in press). Feasibility of a family-involved intervention to increase engagement in evidenced-based psychotherapies for PTSD: a pilot study. Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research and Practice.

# RESOURCES FOR VETERANS & FAMILIES

Visit [Self-help resources](#) to obtain education and support information for Veterans, friends and family members who may be facing mental health challenges. VA specialists have assembled a short list of reviewer's recommended materials that may be helpful in finding the most appropriate information for you.

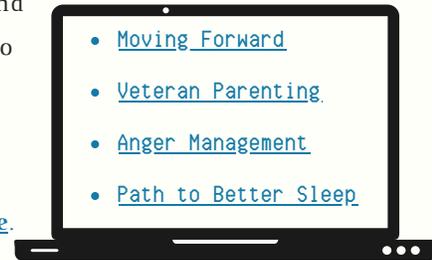
Please click on each resource topic for more information.

- [General Mental Health](#)
- [Depression & Anxiety](#)
- [PTSD](#)
- [Substance Use Disorder \(SUD\)](#)

For additional help, click "[How to Use.](#)"



There are several free and anonymous on-line education and life coaching programs that use interactive exercises and video demonstrations to teach skills for overcoming life challenges. For more information, click [here](#).



## DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

The DMVA Resource Guide is produced and published by the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to assist and educate Veterans in learning about state and federal veteran benefits. View or Download by clicking [here](#).



UPCOMING WEBINARS FOR

### NATIONAL CBOC MENTAL HEALTH GRAND ROUNDS (GRs) and OTHER PRESENTATIONS

Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program: Understanding the Health Care Delivery Model for Intimate Partner Violence

- Presenter: Natalie Peterson, PhD
- Dates: Wednesday, November 8, 2023, 8:00 - 9:00 am CT and Thursday, November 9, 2023, 11:00 am - 12:00 pm CT (repeat)
- Target Audience: VA CBOC mental health providers (all VA providers are welcome to attend)
- Continuing Education (CE) Credit: 1 free hour of JA IPCE, ACCME, AGPE, ANCC, APA, ASWB, NBCC, NYSED-SW, NYSED-P, CRCC

Click [here](#) to register



Check the website for previous webinars in this series available for credit in TMS.

For direct links to upcoming webinars, click [here](#).

For previous GRs recordings click [here](#).

### MIRECC PRESENTS WEBINAR:

The 2022-2023 schedule for MIRECC Presents has concluded. MIRECC Presents will reconvene in October for the 2023-2024 schedule.

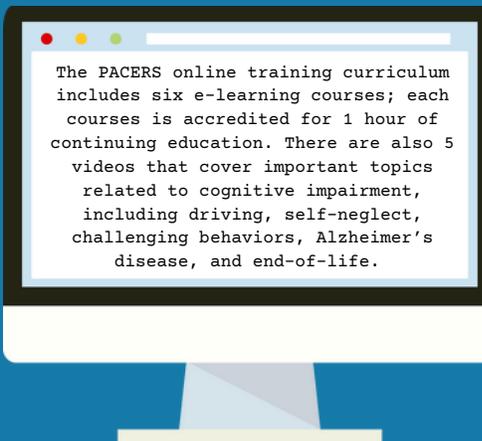
Register through [VA EES TMS](#) then attend LIVE at <http://va-eerc-ees.adobeconnect.com/mireccpresents/>

Access the MIRECC Presents webinar series calendar for upcoming events online at <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/vsn20/Education/webinars-mirecc-presents.asp>

## PROVIDER EDUCATION



PACERS is an education program for health care staff who care for Veterans with cognitive disorders and their caregivers. While this program targets rural health care staff, providers working in any setting can benefit from this information.



The PACERS online training curriculum includes six e-learning courses; each course is accredited for 1 hour of continuing education. There are also 5 videos that cover important topics related to cognitive impairment, including driving, self-neglect, challenging behaviors, Alzheimer's disease, and end-of-life.

**VA Providers:** Take courses using TMS links

**Non-VA Providers:** Use TRAIN links

**Course 1:** Driving and Dementia-Hanging up the Keys.

**Course 2:** How to Deliver the Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease.

**Course 3:** How to Have an End of Life Discussion.

**Course 4:** How to Identify Self-Neglect.

**Course 5:** Addressing Decision-Making and Safety in Dementia.

[VISIT PACERS](#) for links to each course.



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 of Veterans Affairs

## BRIEFINGS

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Next Issue: WINTER 2023