

## Gainesville

Research Enhancement Award Program

Director: William C. Mann, PhD, MS, BS

### Executive Summary for Fiscal Year 2011

The mission of the Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center for Veterans with Neurological Impairment (RORC) Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) is to conduct interdisciplinary research that improves the health, function, and community integration of veterans challenged by disability and limited access to health related services. Rehabilitation and the management of disability and chronic illness are dominant themes in the VA strategic vision. The first VA strategic and enabling goal is to "restore the capability of Veterans with disabilities to the greatest extent possible and improve the quality of their lives and that of their families." The first objective of this goal is to "maximize the physical, mental, and social functioning of Veterans with disabilities and be a leader in providing specialized health care services." The RORC-REAP mission directly addresses these VA priorities through research that improves the quality of rehabilitation services and outcomes. RORC-REAP investigators study how to improve the access, design, administration, management, and cost of rehabilitation care; use state of the science methodologies to develop new and more efficient/precise measures across the continuum of care; and evaluate innovative technology, systems, and processes of care throughout the continuum. They focus on the psychosocial aspects of recovery, informal caregiving, extension of rehabilitation and specialty care, and community reintegration.

The North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System is uniquely positioned to build integrated and productive programs in rehabilitation outcomes research. The coalescence of expertise and talent among neuroscientists, interdisciplinary rehabilitation researchers, health services researchers, clinicians, and social scientists at the RORC-REAP, the RR&D Brain Rehabilitation Research Center of Excellence (BRRC CoE), the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center (GRECC), and the University of Florida (UF) provide access to unusually strong and innovative research programs aimed at improving VA rehabilitation care. The UF College of Public Health and Health Professions (PHHP) combines traditional rehabilitation and public health programs to foster collaborations among public health, health services, and the health professions to address the multifaceted health needs of populations, communities, and individuals. The UF Rehabilitation Science Doctoral program trains graduate students to address the need for faculty in the rehabilitation disciplines. This pool of young rehabilitation scholars provides the RORC-REAP with access to potential career development awardees and investigators interested in rehabilitation outcomes research in the VA. In addition to the RORC-REAP investigators who have joint appointments at PHHP, other jointly appointed staff represent the UF Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, and Dentistry. Using the depth and breadth of expertise available in the community, the RORC-REAP is positioned to strengthen existing outcome evaluation methods and measures in rehabilitation outcomes research. Through our local and regional collaborations, as well as national collaborations with the Office of Rural Health, QUERI, the National Rehabilitation Program Office for Clinical Care and participation and leadership in non-VA organizations, our findings will continue to improve the quality of rehabilitation programs for veterans with disability and positively influence future health and rehabilitation policy.

Over the past fiscal year, RORC-REAP investigators and leadership poised themselves to compete in the HSR&D reorganization into Collaborative Research to Enhance and Advance Transformation and Excellence (CREATE) and Centers of Innovation (COIN). Based on close and productive relationships with the Office of

Rural Health and the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation National Program Office, as well as our joint funding with Rehabilitation Research and Development Service, our topic, Improving VHA Health Services for Rural Veterans with Disability, applies innovative approaches to the serious and complex problem of ensuring that rural-residing Veterans receive needed health services. Recognizing that disability exacerbates access challenges, our CREATE's overall goal is to improve access to health services for rural Veterans with disability. Additionally, we are planning a joint application with the Tampa RR&D/HSR&D Center of Excellence for a Center of Innovation. Both our Advisory Board and our Steering Committee support and encourage the direction we are taking in the next fiscal year.