

## New Look

*Research Briefs* has a new look. This new layout features regular sections (Newly Funded, For Your Information), and an expanded feature story on page 1.

## In this issue

### VA HSR&D: A Look Back

This issue's feature looks back at the roots of VA health services research.

### Award Spotlight

On page 2, learn more about Alice S. Hersh New Investigator Award winner, Ashish Jha, MD, MPH.

### Proceedings from AcademyHealth ARM

VA HSR&D was well-represented at the AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting. To learn more about the presentations, turn to page 2.

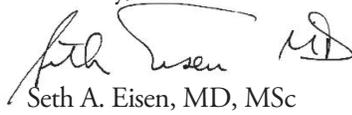
### Newly Funded

Find out more about recently funded studies on pages 4 and 5.

## Director's Note

Welcome to the summer issue of *Research Briefs*. VA was an early adopter of health services research, and in this, our 35th year of operation, we offer a brief primer about our history. In addition, we've included an overview of the 2008 AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting, held in Washington, DC, June 8-10. VA research was strongly represented in the numerous academic sessions, four of which are covered in-depth in this issue. We would also like to extend congratulations to all of our newly-funded HSR&D researchers.

Sincerely,



Seth A. Eisen, MD, MSc  
Director, HSR&D

## Health Services Research: Thirty-Five Years of Groundbreaking Science

As a cohesive and organized field of study, health services research hasn't been in existence for that long, however, the contributions made by VA researchers in the field will stand the test of time. VA was an early adopter for this young field, establishing the Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D) in 1973. For the first time, tools and activities associated with health services research—data systems, planning and evaluation, cost effectiveness analysis—were coordinated across a discrete service area within the Office of Research and Development.

In 1975, VA HSR&D began a cooperative relationship with the National Center for Health Services Research (NCHSR), then a part of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. NCHSR had established regional health services research centers at 8 locations, and VA agreed to provide analogous support to participating VA hospitals. This move marked the beginning of the HSR&D affiliation program, which would evolve into Field Programs, and eventually become today's Centers of Excellence.<sup>1</sup>

### A Focused Mission with National Impact

As VA HSR&D has evolved, it has never lost focus on its central mission: to advance knowledge and promote innovations that improve the health and care of veterans and the nation. And throughout its brief existence, VA HSR&D research has been used within and outside VA to explore strategies for improving health outcomes, evaluate the cost-effectiveness of services and

therapies, and to assess new technologies such as telehealth and computer reminders. Some milestone contributions include:

#### 1970's

##### **Improving care for veterans coping with alcoholism and substance abuse.**

This critical study showed that patients with problems related to alcohol or drug abuse benefitted more from targeted treatment rather than treatment focused on overall health status.<sup>2</sup>

##### **Evaluating a new patient interview and clinical assessment tool, the Addiction Severity Index (ASI).**

This groundbreaking study showed that not only was the ASI easy to administer and highly effective in the prediction of treatment outcomes, it eventually became the standard for screening on a national and international basis.<sup>3</sup>

#### 1980's

##### **Improving the overall rates of flu vaccination in veterans.**

Two studies conduct-

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# Highlights from AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting

VA researchers were well-represented in academic sessions at June's AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting. Highlights included:

- an in-depth consideration of the relationship between the future of genomic medicine and the unique veteran population, with an emphasis on the connection between genetic markers and many of the common chronic conditions with which our veterans must cope;
- a policy roundtable discussion focused on the near- and long-term implications of OEF/OIF veterans' needs for quality, access, and coverage as they return to civilian life;
- the value and impact of the Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP) and how ESP can provide a springboard for larger scale policy changes; and
- updates on military sexual trauma, women's health, and geriatric health.

The Alice S. Hersh New Investigator Award was presented for the second year in a row to a VA HSR&D researcher.

## VA Researchers Focus on Women's Health

As the ranks of women veterans continue to increase, VA is determined to provide optimal care for their unique health-care needs. Health services researchers are contributing significant data to support evidence-based clinical approaches for women veterans. Rachel Kimerling, PhD, part of HSR&D's Center for Health Care Evaluation in Palo Alto, and Becky Yano, PhD, MSPH, with HSR&D's Center for the Study of Healthcare Provider Behavior in Los Angeles presented two recent pieces of research specific to women in VA.



VA researcher Dr. Ashish Jha addressed the AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting June 9 after receiving the group's New Investigator Award.

In a roundtable session chaired by Ron Gimbel of the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, Kimerling presented her recent work, "Developing Gender Specific Indicators of Care of Military-Related Sexual Trauma." Kimerling's work examined military sexual trauma (MST), which is defined as sexual assault or repeated, unsolicited threatening acts of sexual harassment. Kimerling's objective was to develop a clinically relevant indicator for MST screening and treatment based on a series of recent legislative mandates.

By gathering information from VA administrative data, and studying the frequency and use of clinical reminders over a five-year period, Kimerling's team assessed screening rates for MST for veterans currently in mental health treatment. They determined that universally screening those in mental health care for MST was both effective and appropriate for both women and men.

Becky Yano, PhD, MSPH, presented an overview of her recent work, "What Does Women's Health Care Look Like in the VA?" Yano and her colleagues assessed organizational surveys and national census data from all VA health care facilities serving 200 or more women to evaluate how VA women's health care is organized, and how well VA is adapting to women veterans' health care needs.

The implications for Yano's work include some early evidence demonstrating better outcomes for separate women's clinics that address gender-specific processes of care and higher patient ratings of care for accessibility and continuity.

Kimerling's and Yano's work has wide-ranging implications, as VA will continue to face challenges in ensuring high-quality care for women veterans.

## HSR&D Researcher Wins New Investigator Award

VA health services researcher Ashish Jha, MD, MPH, was the recipient of the Alice S. Hersh New Investigator Award for his work on quality efforts and racial disparities in care in the VA healthcare system. Dr. Jha is a staff physician at the Boston VA Medical Center and a faculty member at the Harvard School of Public Health. In his acceptance speech, Dr. Jha spoke about the transformation VHA has made in healthcare delivery over the past 12 years and noted that VA "...has used lessons from health services research to identify areas of need, lessons from health services research to craft policies, and has used health services research to evaluate the impact of the reforms."

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## Highlights *Continued from page 2*

He went on to say, “In 12 short years, quality has gone up, costs stayed stable, safety has gotten better, and I think it is not an exaggeration to say there are tens of thousands of veterans who are alive today because care was improved based on health services research that researchers engaged in.”

## Session Addresses Challenges of Genomic Medicine

The completion of the Human Genome Project provided researchers an unprecedented opportunity to further their understanding of genetics and disease. For health services researchers, the integration of genomics into clinical practice offers a potential new model for the delivery of care. The session, “Health Services Genomics: Opportunities and Challenges,” chaired by Maren Scheuner, MD, of VA’s Center for the Study of Healthcare Provider Behavior in Sepulveda, CA, shed more light on the role health services research will play in shaping the delivery of care derived from genomic medicine.

The session’s opening remarks were presented by Francis Collins, MD, PhD. Dr. Collins is Director of the National Institute of Health’s National Human Genome Research Institute, and led the Human Genome Project to its successful completion. In addition to an introduction to the challenges associated with finding a firm correlation between a gene and disease, Dr. Collins shared his belief that a significant segment of future genomic research lies in identifying markers for many chronic diseases. Further, he emphasized the potential value to genome researchers of VA’s patient population in locating those genetic markers.

Timothy O’Leary, MD, PhD, VA’s Acting Deputy Chief Research and Development Officer, elaborated on Collins’s comments about how VA is uniquely positioned to contribute to—and benefit from—advances in genomic medicine. O’Leary described how VA’s volume of patients, integrated healthcare system, and electronic medical record all work together to provide health services researchers with the unparalleled ability to collect and link genetic information, which can be used to focus on improved patient outcomes, and care delivery models.

Adding a note of caution, Paul Shekelle, MD, PhD, of HSR&D’s Center for the Study of Healthcare Provider



*HSR&D’s booth at the AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting offered attendees information on VA health services research activities.*

Behavior in Los Angeles, offered insight into the overall readiness of VA and other healthcare systems to cope with the impact of genomic medicine. Dr. Shekelle conducted a comprehensive literature review showing that while consumers are cautiously optimistic, the healthcare workforce (providers in particular) is inadequately trained to handle genomic medicine, and there is very limited evidence currently available that demonstrates positive outcomes.

## Roundtable Introduces VA’s Evidence Synthesis Program

Taking valid research evidence and implementing it is critical for improving the health of our veterans. In 2005, HSR&D established the Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP) to provide policymakers with a rigorous analysis of available evidence to support their decision-making efforts. This roundtable session was chaired by Mark Helfand, MD, MPH, FACP of the Portland VAMC. Panelists included Joe Francis, MD, MPH, of VA’s Office of Quality and Performance, and Paul Shekelle, MD, PhD.

Drs. Francis and Shekelle discussed the processes through which topics can become part of ESP, and how ESP topics may move forward from assessment to eventually become an implemented, system-wide policy. Current ESP reports are available on the HSR&D website at [www.hsr.d.research.va.gov/publications/esp/](http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov/publications/esp/).

# Newly Funded

Only awards/projects with funding start dates that have been confirmed since the last issue of *Research Briefs* in March 2008 are listed here.

## Career Awardees

<b>David Haggstrom, MD</b>	Indianapolis VAMC	Patterns of Follow-up Care among Colorectal Cancer Survivors
<b>Susan Hastings, MD</b>	Durham VAMC	Improving Care for Older Veterans Discharged from Emergency Treatment
<b>Sylvia Hysong, PhD, MA</b>	Houston VAMC	Organizational Correlates of Outpatient Performance Trends in VAMCs
<b>Salomeh Keyhani, MD, MPH</b>	Bronx VAMC	How Does Dual Use Affect the Health of Elderly Veterans with Chronic Diseases
<b>Ian Kudel, PhD</b>	Cincinnati VAMC	Self-Reported Quality of Life in Patients with HIV and HIV/HCV
<b>Luci Leykum, MD, MBA</b>	VA South Texas Health Care System	The Role of Complexity Science in Improving Clinical Microsystems
<b>Jeffrey Scherrer, PhD</b>	St. Louis VAMC	Heart Disease among VA Patients with Depression

## Research Career Scientists

<b>Hayden Bosworth, PhD</b>	Durham VAMC
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## Projects

### Deployment Health Research

<b>Zia Agha, MD, MS</b>	VA San Diego Health Care System	Veterans Telemedicine Outreach for PTSD Services
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### Implementation Rapid Response Projects

<b>Allison Collins, PhD</b>	VA Boston Health Care System	Promoting Physical Activity in Overweight and Obese Veterans
<b>Teresa Damush, PhD</b>	Indianapolis VAMC	Stop Tobacco-Attributable Risk after Stroke
<b>Matthew Goetz, MD</b>	VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System	Evaluating the Implementation of Rapid Testing for HIV infection in a VA Emergency Department
<b>Gregory Goodrich, PhD</b>	VA Palo Alto Health Care System	Visual Dysfunction in PNS OIF/OEF Patients: A Pilot Study
<b>Paul Heidenreich, MD</b>	VA Palo Alto Health Care System	MHV: Health Status Measure and Quality of Care Assessment
<b>Robert Kerns, PhD</b>	VA Connecticut Health Care System	Pain Assessment in Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers
<b>Gudrun Lange, PhD</b>	VA New Jersey Health Care System	Transition from TBI Screen to Full Assessment: Barriers & Facilitators
<b>Delois Long, PhD</b>	Cleveland VAMC	Implementing a Computerized Pressure Ulcer Assessment for SCI Patients
<b>Ileana Piña, MD</b>	Cleveland VAMC	QI in Heart Failure for VA Cleveland Facilities: An Implementation Plan
<b>Suparna Rajan, PhD</b>	VA Puget Sound Health Care System	Development of MOVE! Education Materials for Veterans with SCI
<b>Kathryn Sappas, PhD</b>	Miami VA Health Care System	Strategic Plan to Implement Evidence Based Hand-Off & Improve Outcomes
<b>Meredith Tackett, PhD</b>	VA Puget Sound Health Care System	Development of a Peer Visitation Program for SCI Veterans and Caregivers
<b>Aaron Turner, PhD</b>	VA Puget Sound Health Care System	Pilot Validation of the VA National Data Repository

### Investigator-Initiated Research

<b>Dawn Bravata, MD</b>	Indianapolis VAMC	Diagnosis and Treatment of Sleep Apnea in Cerebrovascular Disease
<b>Christopher Bryson, MD, MS</b>	VA Puget Sound Health Care System	Organizational Correlates of Adherence to Medication
<b>Guoqing Chen, PhD, MD, MPH</b>	Charleston VAMC	Treatment Cost for Veterans with Chronic Kidney Disease
<b>Matthew Chinman, PhD</b>	VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System	Promoting Recovery Using Mental Health Consumer Providers
<b>Steven Fu, MD, MSCE</b>	Minneapolis VAMC	Proactive Tobacco Treatment for Diverse Veteran Smokers

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# Newly Funded

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<b>Sarah Hawley, PhD, MPH</b>	VA Ann Arbor Health Care System	Evaluating a Preference-based Intervention for Increasing CRC Screening
<b>Fasiha Kanwal, MBBS</b>	VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System	Quality of Care among Patients with Chronic Hepatitis C Virus Infection
<b>Paul Katz, MD</b>	Buffalo VAMC	VA Nursing Homes: Medical Staff Models and Care Correlates
<b>Sarah Krein, PhD, RN</b>	VA Ann Arbor Health Care System	Veterans Walk to Beat Back Pain
<b>Patrick Mauldin, PhD, MA</b>	Charleston VAMC	Ethnic Differences in Medication Adherence and Cost for Elderly Veterans with DM
<b>Adam Powell, PhD, MBA</b>	Minneapolis VAMC	Effects of Performance Measurement on Healthcare Systems
<b>John Rumsfeld, MD, PhD</b>	Denver VAMC	Patient-Centered Disease Management for Heart Failure Trial
<b>Mary Ann Sevick, ScD, MS</b>	VA Pittsburgh Health Care System	Expert System-Based Feedback in Sedentary Overweight Veterans
<b>Carl Stepnowsky, PhD</b>	VA San Diego Health Care System	Improving Obstructive Sleep Apnea Management via Wireless Telemonitoring
<b>Christine Timko, PhD</b>	VA Palo Alto Health Care System	Treating Violence-Prone Substance Use Disorder Patients
<b>Sandeep Vijan, MD, MS</b>	VA Ann Arbor Health Care System	Improving Quality Measurement Using Quality Adjusted Life Years
<b>Bradley Watts, MD, MPH</b>	White River Junction VAMC	Decision Aid in Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
<b>Steven Weisbord, MD, MSc</b>	VA Pittsburgh Health Care System	Pain, Sexual Dysfunction, and Depression in Hemodialysis Patients
<b>Alan West, PhD</b>	White River Junction VAMC	Access Factors Affecting VA Enrollees' Use of Non-VA Medical Care
<b>John Whited, MD, MHS</b>	Columbia VAMC	Impact of Teledermatology on Health Services Outcomes in the VA
<b>Wen-Chih Wu, MD</b>	Providence VAMC	Group Intervention for DM Guideline Implementation
<b>Elizabeth Yano, PhD, MSPH</b>	VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System	Impact of Practice Structure on Quality of Care for Women Veterans (Phase 2)
<b>Nursing Research Initiative</b>		
<b>Inez Joseph, RN</b>	Tampa VAMC	Early Trajectory of Wandering in Veterans with Mild Dementia
<b>Service-Directed Projects</b>		
<b>Constance Uphold, PhD, MS</b>	North Florida/South Georgia VA Health Care System	Web-based Informational Materials for Caregivers of Veterans Post-Stroke
<b>Service-Directed Research</b>		
<b>Kerry Donnelly, PhD</b>	Buffalo VAMC	Cognitive Assessment of Veterans after Traumatic Brain Injury
<b>Joan Griffin, PhD</b>	Minneapolis VAMC	Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Informal Caregivers to Improve Outcomes for Traumatic Brain Injury Patients with Polytrauma
<b>Todd Wagner, PhD</b>	VA Palo Alto Health Care System	The Cost and Benefits of the VA Central Institutional Review Board

## For Your Information

*VA HSR&D Research Briefs* is a semi-annual publication of the Office of Research and Development's Health Services Research and Development Service. This issue, along with archived issues of *Research Briefs* and other publications, can be found at [www.hsrdr.research.va.gov](http://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov), or [vawww.hsrdr.research.va.gov](http://vawww.hsrdr.research.va.gov).

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### Contact

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## History *Continued from page 1*

ed from 1981 to 1986 examined the rates of flu vaccination, and ultimately resulted in the adoption of a national VA policy on annual flu shots.<sup>4</sup>

**Re-evaluating the risks and benefits of coronary bypass surgery among the elderly.** In this study, concluded in 1989, researchers determined that for some elderly, traditional coronary artery bypass surgery outweighs the risks associated with major surgery.<sup>5</sup>

### 1990's

**Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) established.** In collaboration with VA's Central Office, Veterans Integrated Service Networks, and facilities, the nine QUERI centers conduct a diverse portfolio of research projects that develop or adapt effective quality enhancement tools and strategies into multifaceted quality improvement programs.

**Implementing national primary care assessment tools through the Veterans Health Study (VHS).** The VHS resulted in the creation of a modified short form health survey (SF-36) to assess functional status. That form is now in use nationwide throughout VA.

### 2000's

**Assessing quality report cards for healthcare organizations.** The advent of

quality improvement initiatives throughout large healthcare organizations formed the basis for this investigation. The study examined how well current "report cards" do in delivering data on individual physician performance.<sup>7</sup>

**Implementing collaborative care models for depression.** Translating Initiatives for Depression into Effective Solutions (TIDES) is a major undertaking designed to incorporate collaborative care for depression in the primary care setting. Preliminary findings show that a high percentage of patients with depression can be successfully treated in primary care.<sup>8</sup>

**Improving screening for HIV.** In this study, researchers addressed the need to improve rates of HIV screening by implementing a nurse-based rapid testing pilot program. The program was highly successful and is currently being adopted by several VA clinics.<sup>9</sup>

## The Future of VA HSR&D

From its beginnings in 1973, VA's health services research program has continued to strengthen and expand its reach. Its collaborative relationships with both VA operations and VA's academic affiliates are invaluable to researchers and provide a critical forum for their investigations. In the future, HSR&D will work to continue to provide a rich and thriving

research environment and to support studies that will ultimately provide better care for our veterans and the nation.

To learn more about VA HSR&D studies, findings, and citations, visit our web site at [www.hsr.d.research.va.gov](http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov).

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> VA Dept. of Medicine & Surgery, Briefing 1-5 (3/9/81): A Paper on the Affiliation Program, p.159
- <sup>2</sup> "Evaluation of Substance Abuse Treatment," McLellan, A. T. (1977-1981) Philadelphia, PA.
- <sup>3</sup> "Evaluation of the Addiction Severity Index," McLellan, A. T. (1979-1980) Philadelphia, PA.
- <sup>4</sup> "Prospective Modeling and Prediction of Influenza," Carter, W. (1981-1983) Seattle, WA.
- <sup>5</sup> "Program in the Economics of Health Care of the Elderly," Garber, A. (1987-1989) Palo Alto, CA.
- <sup>6</sup> "The Veterans Health Study." Kazis, L. (1994-1999) Bedford, MA.
- <sup>7</sup> "HSR&D Career Development Award: Where Report Cards Fear to Tread." Hofer, T. (1995-2001) Ann Arbor, MI
- <sup>8</sup> Rubenstein, L.; Yano, E.; Chaney, E.; et. al. ed. *Collaborative Care for Depression in a Primary Care Setting: A Primer on VA's Translating Initiatives for Depression into Effective Solutions (TIDES) Project.* (August 2008) Boston, MA.
- <sup>9</sup> "Improving HIV Screening by Nurse Rapid Testing, Streamlined Counseling," Asch, S. (2005-2007) Los Angeles, CA.

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