



## GRECCs: VA's Networks of Research Excellence Explore Aging, Age-related Diseases, and Promising Interventions

*...what follows is a small sampling of findings from the hundreds of research investigations currently underway in VHA's Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Centers*

The **Million Veteran Project (MVP)**, spearhead by Dr. Mike Gaziano of the **New England GRECC**, has enrolled over a half million Veterans since 2011. GRECCs in Miami, Little Rock, Baltimore, Birmingham and over a dozen other sites have teamed up to harness the power of the VA medical record, administrative data, genomics, and patient survey responses to create a database that will be uniquely equipped to answer many fundamental questions about Veterans, aging, injuries and disease.

### **Pittsburgh GRECC Studies Strokes in Elderly Mice**

Most experimental stroke studies in mice have been performed using young animals and have yielded results that do not translate well to what doctors see in clinic—for the simple reason that stroke typically afflicts elderly people. Investigators at the **Pittsburgh GRECC** compared the effects of stroke in young and in aged mice, demonstrating a difference in long-term outcomes between the two groups. Aged mice also exhibited deterioration of functional outcomes after stroke, which was linked to white matter damage in their brains and reduction in their bodies' reduced ability to activate particular cells, call M2 microglia/macrophages) that protect the brain in younger mice.

### **Linkages Among Traumatic Brain Injury, PTSD, Depression, and Substance Abuse**

Drs. McGlinchey and Milberg of the New England GRECC co-direct the Translational Research Center for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Stress Disorders (TRACTS) with a satellite site in Houston; and the VA Rehabilitation Research and Development TBI Center of Excellence. The Boston site has enrolled 430 OEF/OIF Veterans who have experienced mild TB; comprehensively assessed them with cognitive, emotional, biological and neuroimaging tests; and involved them in innovative cognitive and behavioral therapies that promise to shed light on the linkages among, and means for treating, these challenging results of wartime (and sports-related) injuries.

### **Risky Business: Studying Drug Effects on People Who are Younger Than the People Who are Actually Going to Have to Take Them.**

Although older adults are generally among the highest users of cardiovascular medications, people in this age group have typically been under-represented or excluded from most drug efficacy and safety trials, largely because of their complex medical states. Cardiology, Geriatrics, and Pharmacology investigators at the Pittsburgh GRECC reviewed the complex age-related pharmacological challenges inherent in prescribing to this group. Their analysis highlighted how the impacts of these factors are further compounded by the underrepresentation of older adults in large clinical trials; and how this in turn leads to non-compliance, unintended harms, and missed opportunities to optimize care.

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### **VA Research on Older Adults with Sleep Problems**

Sleep complaints from older adults are very common, and for many daytime sleepiness interferes with their activities of daily living. Like other syndromes and symptoms in older adults, sleep problems are often caused by multiple precipitating causes and risk factors, including health conditions, treatments, environmental conditions, and psychological or behavioral issues. In the November 2016 issue of the journal *Clinical Therapeutics*, Dr. Boockvar, AD-R of VISN 2 GRECC, guest edited a series of articles on sleep problems in older adults that featured VA investigators' work nationwide [*Clinical Therapeutics* 2016; 38: 2330-2415]. First, a narrative review of sleep medicines in older adults supported the general recommendation that drugs be avoided for sleep problems in older adults. A second article reported results of a national survey of Veterans' treatment preferences in which respondents chose non-pharmacological treatment for insomnia as more acceptable than pharmacological treatment. A third article showed that in a national sample of surveyed adults, nocturia was associated with worse functional outcomes of sleep among adults older than 65 years, even with just two interruptions in sleep each night to urinate. Four additional articles underscore the high prevalence of sleep problems in older adults and their complications.

