Department of Veterans Affairs
National Research Advisory Council (NRAC) Meeting
Room 104, 1100 First Street, NE Washington, DC
December 4, 2019

Minutes

Members Present
David G. Young, Chair
Lee Bitsi
Carrie Farmer
Jerry Lee (by teleconference)
Maria Lima
Boris Lushniak
Geoffrey Ling
Yvonne Maddox (by teleconference)
Catherine Wiclkund

Members Absent
Andrew Guccione
James Lillard
Ross McKinney

VA Staff Present
Avery Rock, Designated Federal Official (DFO)
Grant Huang, Alternate DFO
Rashelle Robinson, Alternate DFO
Wendy Tenhula
Carlton Andrews
Maria Souden
Uben Mendie
Karen Seigel
Patricia Dorn
Amy Kilbourne
Theresa Gleason

Public
Tran Hawk

CALL TO ORDER/OPENING REMARKS
Avery Rock, DFO; Grant Huang, Alternate DFO; Rashelle Robinson, Alternate DFO; Brig. Gen. David G. Young, Chair; Wendy Tenhula, Deputy Chief Research and Development Officer
Dr. Young, NRAC Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:10 am. Avery Rock introduced herself as DFO for the meeting. Dr. Huang and Rashelle Robinson served as the alternate DFO’s. Avery Rock gave opening statements regarding the committee, its purpose and the process for public comments. Dr. Young then called for introductions from committee members and discussed the agenda. The minutes from the last meeting were approved.

Dr. Young turned things over to Dr. Tenhula for her opening remarks and ORD updates. She thanked the departing committee members for their service and noted that the members will receive their signed appreciation certificates from the Secretary. Dr. Tenhula also thanked the committee members who committed to serving an additional term. Outcomes from a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) review as to how the Office of Research and Development (ORD) set priorities for its funded research were summarized. It was noted that no findings came from the GAO report. Additional ORD accomplishments were highlighted in the annual report provided to NRAC members. She informed the members that ORD is considering its organizational structure and provided some updates on the PREVENT Executive Order on preventing Veteran suicide. She further discussed moving forward and the importance of NRAC in providing advice and input to the Secretary, ORD and the entire agency on research matters and ensuring great work. Dr. Tenhula ended with an introduction of the new ORD Director of Communications to help with the new ORD strategies.

**ORD Communications:** Ubon Mendie, Director of Communications, spoke about having more public affairs representatives and training investigators on how to better communicate while also aligning VA/ORD priorities. He discussed how the academic affiliates spoke more about VA research. He stated that if ORD can speak up more, it can help to change the perceptions that academic affiliates are doing most of the VA work. Mr. Mendie posed some questions to the NRAC for their advice and input on topics to include:

- How do we impact Veterans and Americans?
- Why we do what we do?
- How to communicate all research studies from a broader perspective?
- Suggestions on how to advertise the successful partnerships of VA and Academic Affiliations.

**Real-world impact and NRAC Discussion:** Dr. Kilbourne provided updates regarding the Real-World Priorities and requested feedback and input from the NRAC. Dr. Young emphasized that the VA does research that no one else would do and expressed that what is being done has great impact for all Americans. Dr. Lushniaik reflected on his attendance at a NATO conference and explained that other parts of the world envy how special the VA is to have a separate and dedicated entity for Veterans. He also posed a
question on how do we change the lives of Veterans, their families, and society? Dr. Ling indicated that VA investigators have academic affiliations and areas like chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) research is very well known, but no one ever hears that it’s VA research and that the VA is a source of “pride and swagger”. Dr. Young suggested considering VA Choice ads as one way to advertise research work being conducted by the VA and that it is an important discussion to consider. Dr. Bitsos suggested more diversity and inclusion as he stated that there are unique opportunities to highlight VA diversity. Dr. Maddox emphasized better awareness of the Million Veteran Program (MVP). Ms. Farmer stated that a lack of trust is a barrier and that there is an advantage when affiliates are involved. She also added that avoiding a self-serving VA agenda helps with perceptions of legitimacy. Dr. Kilbourne asked NRAC if they were in support of efforts to use case study with precision oncology? Dr. Ling asked what quality management tools would be used? Dr. Kilbourne’s reply was to monitor the use and evaluate if people are utilizing the test and to look at the process of care from a systemic level. Dr. Wickland suggested looking at workforce issues such as genetic counseling. Dr. Young stated that genetic testing can be expensive and that often time things can be inappropriately ordered. He further stated that clinical transformation needs to be looked at. Dr. Lee asked if timeframes would be used as a factor to be examined such as pre/post FDA approval or pre/post 2016 retrospective look?

Annual NRAC Report & Recommendations

Avery Rock and Dr. Huang presented the annual NRAC report and asked the committee to provide a grade on appropriate portfolio balance and program management. Dr. Huang discussed recommendations and actions summary. Ms. Rock discussed and reviewed the SMART template for making recommendations to the SECVA. Dr. Young discussed the previous September minutes and recommendations with the members. He further discussed the Electronic Health Record (EHR) to include IT issues, privacy, and the Big Data DOE efforts.

Dr. Huang discussed future meetings and asked the committee members for suggestions for possible meeting sites and topics. The NRAC suggested joint meetings at VA facilities such as Stanford-Palo Alto, Tampa, Albuquerque, as well as VA research programs that may be struggling such as Chicago and Miami. NRAC also suggested that ORD present challenging cases from these facilities to better understand situations that researchers and research offices face and how NRAC can potentially advise SECVA. Another question was raised on whether there can be a focus on smaller sites that may need to grow their research departments. Other suggestions were that Tech Transfer report revenues in the NRAC report and a list of other FAQs that can better be aligned with the priorities. Dr Huang reported that a tutorial on “how
to propose research of benefit to Veterans for those from outside the VA" was expected to be completed by February 2020.

**Electronic Medical Record Modernization Update:** Dr. Maria Souden presented slides and updates regarding the Cerner transition. Dr. Souden asked for suggestions and input from NRAC. She spoke about the "Death by a Thousand Clicks" article in Fortune Magazine, the Joint Legacy Viewer experience with DOD/VA efforts in San Antonio, TX., and the development of a white paper for the Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization. A question was asked regarding what is the biggest barrier to getting research done and what should be the major thing to be addressed? NRAC expressed significant concerns about the next generation workflow and lost opportunities if the Cerner transition does not properly consider research requirements and incorporate research appropriately into the systems design. Dr. Souden also highlighted work that remains in: migrating and mapping data into Cerner; sustaining availability of EHR data for reuse; data governance and data access; impact on research administration and support; and ORD Strategic Initiative for Research/EHR Synergy. They further discussed that the Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) should be of high priority to the Secretary. NRAC indicated that IT support and protected time are also key reasons for weaknesses in the ability for research to be successful.

**Public Comments:** It was suggested by Mr. Tran Hawk that the NRAC report on page 37 should be corrected regarding the role of the VA Non-Profit Program Office.

**Finalize Recommendations to Secretary:** Dr. Young led the committee members in a discussion of three recommendations for the SECVA to consider. Dr. Huang asked to help with the initial draft based on the NRAC comments/minutes which would then be distributed to the Chair and committee members to be finalized.

The next committee meeting will be held March 4, 2020. The meeting will consist of five new committee members and the new selected NRAC Chair, Dr. Geoffrey Ling.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Signature]

David G. Young III, M.D., FACP, Brig. Gen. USAF (Ret.)
Chair, National Research Advisory Council