

**U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs  
Office of Research and Development  
Meeting of the National Research Advisory Council (NRAC)  
June 3, 2020**

**Minutes**

**Committee Members**

Dr. Geoffrey Ling, Chairman  
Dr. Sanjay Doddamani  
Dr. Steven Dubinett  
Dr. Carrie M. Farmer  
Dr. James W. Lillard  
Dr. Maria F. Lima  
Dr. Ronald Poropatich  
Dr. Ross McKinney  
Catherine A. L. Wicklund, MS  
Dr. Jerry S.H. Lee  
Dr. Paula Schnurr  
Matthew Kuntz, JD

**Speakers**

Dr. Grant Huang  
Dr. Rachel Ramoni  
Dr. Theresa Gleason  
Dr. David Atkins  
Dr. Wendy Tenhula

Marisue Cody, Designated Federal Officer  
Rashelle Robinson, Alternate DFO

The virtual meeting of the VA's National Research Advisory Council took place on June 3, 2020. Designated Federal Officer Marisue Cody opened up the meeting with a couple of announcements, and performed a virtual roll call – 'attendees' are tuning in via the telephone, computer, or both.

Dr. Geoffrey Ling, Chairperson, welcomed the group, and noted the diverse makeup of the Council, as well as the veteran population that it serves. He spoke of his desire to get more veterans, and their families, involved in research – not just as subjects, but as young researchers/ investigators.

Dr. Lee spoke of the rising importance of convalescent plasma as an experimental treatment option for COVID-19 and other viruses. Plasma taken from the blood of those who have recovered from the virus is now in demand for possibly treating not only veterans, but the general population as well.

Dr. Huang put on a PowerPoint presentation detailing the COVID-19 research being done by the VA, and how the VA plans to collaborate with other agencies on the virus, as well as other subjects. The VA website known as ORD COVID-10 SharePoint (<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vacovhacomm/admin/projects/covid19>) is loaded with relevant information for interested parties who have a VA e-mail address. The Office of Research and Development is heavily involved in so many other aspects of research as well – providing webinars, recruiting research volunteers, partnering with major medical centers nationwide, and so on.

There was a discussion regarding funding for both COVID-19 research and non-COVID. It was noted that infection rates for COVID are much higher amongst our African-American population.

Dr. Atkins spoke on the topic of mental health research, and the delivery of mental health services, and how both have obviously been affected by COVID-19. Dr. Gleason told the group about specific studies currently underway, or upcoming, including the research on the impact of COVID on healthcare workers, in and out of the VA.

Dr. Tenhula spoke of budget issues through fiscal year 2022. Of primary importance - the priorities of increasing the access of veterans to high-quality clinical trials, increasing the real-world impact of VA research, and putting VA data to work for veterans.

Precision oncology was added to the list of clinical priorities, which also includes suicide prevention, traumatic brain injury, PTSD, etc. Gulf War military exposures has been expanded to include the broader area of military exposures in general.

Dr. Tenhula reminded the group that budgeting, like most everything else, is a team sport, and she would love to get feedback from Council members, and other participants, on research funding issues.

Dr. Ramoni spoke about VISNs, and got some positive feedback from the group about possibly having a meeting with the 10N, the highest level of clinical partners. Chairman Ling reiterated his belief that top-notch clinical care has to be tied to research, and that the VA has truly been a step ahead of late, in the clinical research arena.

#### Action items:

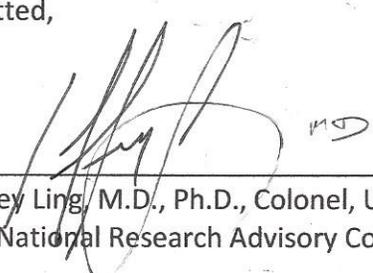
Establish a subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion – Develop a concept paper for the next NRAC meeting for the full council to react to.

Follow up next meeting on the mental health portfolio focusing on disparities prevention and health care workers.

Follow up next meeting on how to work with our operations partners, to map out structurally how to build research as core to excellence in the health care system.

There was no public commentary, and DFO Cody announced that the next NRAC meeting will take place on September 2<sup>nd</sup>; virtual or face-to-face to be determined. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Submitted,



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Geoffrey Ling, M.D., Ph.D., Colonel, US Army (retired)  
Chair, National Research Advisory Council