

**Department of Veterans Affairs
National Research Advisory Council Meeting
Room 730, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
June 8, 2016**

Minutes

Members Present

Feussner, John R., Chair
Bitsoi, Lee L.
Rauch, Terry M.
Steinwachs, Donald M. (by phone)
Washington, Donna L.
West, Barbara F.
Young, David

VA Staff Present

Snyder, Robert D., Chief of Staff
Atkins, David
Baer, Bridgett
Blackburn, Scott
Cilladi-Rehrer, Pauline
Cody, Marisue
Gleason, Theresa
Huang, Grant
Jaeger, Robert
Kaplan, John
Kilbourne, Amy
Moragne, Jeffrey
Muralidhar, Sumitra
Przygodzki, Ronald

Call to Order - Robert Jaeger, PhD, Acting DFO

Dr. Jaeger called the meeting to order at 9:16 a.m.

Introductions - John R. Feussner, MD, MPH, Chair

The members and other attendees introduced themselves.

Comments - David Atkins, MD, PhD, Acting CRADO

Dr. Atkins reported that the search for a new Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO) has closed, and there were at least three strong candidates. The Office of Research and Development (ORD) participated in a hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Committee's Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee on June 7. The subcommittee expressed concerns over contracting issues, and whether VA appropriately shared in the revenue from hepatitis C research in Atlanta. Staff had raised the issue that there was a sense VA was not making full use of its nonprofit corporations to administer non-VA grants. Dr. Atkins said it was unclear whether there was interest in pushing the matter further. ORD

is working on its budget request for 2018. It has been instructed to prepare a flatline budget from 2017.

Precision Medicine Activities - Sumitra Muralidhar, PhD

VA's vision for the Million Veteran Program (MVP) was to improve the health of Veterans and the general public through precision medicine. VA hoped to enroll at least a million participants and expand computational capacity to serve over 1,000 simultaneous users by 2020, have a secure biorepository with back-up, and establish mechanisms to return results responsibly to providers and participants. As of April 22, 483,526 participants had been enrolled. The Sound-Off to 500K! campaign was launched in April, with a target date of July 29 for reaching the 500,000 mark. About 400,000 samples have been genotyped, 28,000 exome sequenced, and 2,000 whole genome sequenced. An MVP Industry Day in July 2015 led to public-private partnerships with Lockheed Martin Healthcare and Seven Bridges. In order to be a leader in precision medicine, VA will require new funding. It is developing interagency agreements with the Department of Energy (DOE) and Department of Defense (DoD). Active duty members will be enrolled into MVP beginning in fiscal year 2016 (FY2016), starting with the Millennium Cohort Study. VA is collaborating with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to enroll Veterans in the Precision Medicine Initiative Cohort Program.

Precision Medicine in Mental Health - Amy Kilbourne, PhD, Ronald Przygodzki, MD

Precision Mental Health (PMH) is a clinical initiative to understand the genomics and pharmacogenomics of depression in Veterans, develop individualized approaches to treat it, and implement a responsible and efficient process of returning genetic data to providers and patients. The initial pilot study will lay the foundation for managing the complex integration of precision medicine research and clinical care. Dr. David Oslin is leading the proposal development for the initial pilot study. The Evidence-Based Synthesis Program (ESP) Center will draft a review of the evidence. The PMH program is anticipated to begin in FY2017.

The Vice President's Cancer Moonshot - David Atkins, MD, PhD, Acting CRADO

Vice President Biden is spearheading the Cancer Moonshot, a \$1 billion initiative to accelerate progress in cancer research. The initiative has brought together leaders across multiple Federal agencies to discuss new collaborations on research, data sharing, and policy to accelerate research. There are three VA components to Cancer Moonshot: MVP-CHAMPION, a partnership between VA and DOE; the Precision Oncology Program, which will help create an organized registry of cancer patients in VA based on their molecular profiles; and a partnership with DoD and the National Cancer Institute.

VIP Guest - Robert D. Snyder, Chief of Staff, Department of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Snyder recalled his first meeting with Secretary Robert A. McDonald, who praised VA's Values Statement and Strategic Plan, but felt there was a problem in execution. In response, Mr. Snyder led the development of the MyVA strategy, which was based on improving the Veteran and employee experience, bolstering internal support services, establishing a culture of continuous performance improvement, and enhancing strategic partnerships. The strategy gave rise to 12 initiatives, eight of which are focused on Veterans, the other four on the department. VA hopes that whoever wins the Presidential election will want to continue these initiatives. President Obama's research and development (R&D) budget request for VA is \$663.4 million and represents a 13 percent

increase from FY2015. The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee has marked up an omnibus bill, which, if passed, would clarify VA's purchased care authorities, enhance compensation rates, provide flexibility to overcome funding restrictions, and help streamline the disability claims appeals process. Mr. Snyder noted that the Commission on Care was due to issue a report on June 30. He asked the Council to review the report and evaluate how the Commission's recommendations would affect research and development if implemented.

LUNCH BREAK

Air Force Health Study Status - Donna Washington, MD, MPH, Robert Jaeger, PhD

NRAC had created a subcommittee to determine if it was worthwhile to continue access to data from the Air Force Health Study. The subcommittee largely agreed with an Institute of Medicine (IOM report) which concluded that an insufficient amount of time had passed for the pilot research studies to have an impact. The subcommittee recommended that NRAC (1) defer assessment of the pilot studies until receiving timelines and progress reports from the IOM; and (2) specifically request this information from the IOM. After discussing the matter, NRAC members agreed to work on recommendations based on the following questions: (1) Do these studies need to be continued because they provide potential new benefit about Agent Orange exposure; and (2) Is this a unique resource that should be maintained, and that either VA or DoD should consider what research questions might be appropriate using these samples?

MyVA - Scott Blackburn

Mr. Blackburn said the purpose of MyVA was to place the emphasis on the Veteran, and change VA from a rules-based culture to one based on principles. Mr. Blackburn told the story of three VA employees in Vermont whose proactivity saved a Veteran's life. This anecdote gave rise to the MyVA Story of the Week, which encouraged VA employees to share similar stories, and has garnered an overwhelming response. VA is refreshing its management tools so the Department is run more like a business and less like a bureaucracy. The Secretary has adopted six of the 12 MyVA initiatives; the Deputy Secretary has adopted the other six. Both are meeting with each of the small working teams for an hour every other week.

Technology Transfer Program - John Kaplan, PhD, Director, Don Steinwachs, PhD, Subcommittee Chair

At its last meeting, NRAC formed a subcommittee to determine the program's mission, scope of activities, funding support, and staffing structure. The subcommittee hopes to complete its work, or at least make significant progress, in time for the next NRAC meeting in September. Dr. Kaplan, the program's new director, and Ms. Baer, a management analyst with a background in tech transfer, introduced themselves to the Council. The program plans to hire three specialists who should be on board soon. Dr. Steinwachs said the subcommittee was focused on recruitment of specialists, identifying universities VA could consult with on how to handle tech transfer, and comparing research activities at VA with those at NIH. Chair Feussner suggested that Dr. Cody and/or Ms. Cilladi-Rehrer organize a conference call with the subcommittee and program leadership in an effort to formulate a circumscribed plan of action.

Comments from the Public

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

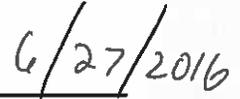
Members discussed whether to begin Council meetings earlier or later. They found no compelling reason to change the 9 a.m. start time. The Council considered holding meetings in the field, agreed to keep the idea on the table. Chair Feussner suggested that the Council hold a joint meeting with the Office of Academic Affiliations within a year. He adjourned the meeting at 2:36 p.m.

Pauline Cilladi-Rehrer, DFO

Date



John R. Feussner, Chair



Date