



From the Director

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this issue of *GRECC AdVAnces*.

As vaccination rates rise, COVID cases decline and we begin to resume some of our pre-COVID activities, the GRECCs have kept busy with research, clinical demonstration and educational programs.

This issue's articles will bring you up to date on:

- A novel balance training approach from Baltimore
- A popular TMS training developed by the Birmingham/Atlanta GRECC for VA staff to use to communicate effectively with Veterans who have Alzheimer's disease and related dementias
- The adoption of Age-Friendly Health Systems principles, already in place at 13 of the GRECCs

As always, please feel free to reach out to any of the contacts listed for more information on the news items included.

Thank you for reading this and please share with your colleagues.

Happy Summer all!

Falls and Balance

Researchers at the Baltimore GRECC are developing a novel *Balance Assessment and Training Protocol* (BATP) to better understand how balance is controlled and maintained, and how this is affected by aging, disease, and neurological insults such as stroke. The BATP



employs a psychophysical Adaptive Staircase Algorithm to rigorously quantify a subject's *Limit of Balance* (LoB) in a balanced reach task where the subject stands and points without stepping to a target disk

moving randomly in front of them.

Subjects are then assessed or trained in a similar tracking task that requires them to remain at their LoB throughout to accurately track the target. Assessing subjects at their LoB better exposes balance system deficiencies for identification. Training subjects at their LoB and increasing task difficulty as LoB improves, is an example of *performance accomplishment*, a key element of Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory. We hypothesize that training subjects under these conditions will be superior to Multi-Component Exercise Training, currently the most widely used balance intervention.

A Balanced Reach Training Platform to Address Balance Disorders in Older and Neurologically Disabled Veterans, Merit Award (HP-00091115): Co-PIs: Jay Barton, PhD. and Charlene Hafer-Macko, MD.



Start Making Sense

Everyone working in VHA patient care settings will encounter Veterans with cognitive impairment(s). Effective communication is fundamental for quality health care. Birmingham /Atlanta GRECC's [Start Making Sense: How to Communicate Effectively With Veterans With Dementia](#) (TMS Course #15874) provides dementia communication training for all VHA staff, including nonclinical staff.



Start Making Sense includes a [video](#) that presents "a day in the life" of a Veteran with cognitive impairment navigating a visit to the VA Medical Center. Vignettes show typical health care communications, including how the Veteran experiences these. The video then portrays these interactions once more; this time implementing the *Start Making Sense* communication strategies. An included handout reiterates strategies to **RECOGNIZE** and **ACT** to enhance communication and ensure accessible, patient-centered care.

As of September 2020, *Start Making Sense* is a VHA Dementia Core Curriculum module and recommended for all staff (VHA Directive 1140.12 *Dementia System of Care Implementation Guidance*). More than 13,300 learners have completed the training this fiscal year.



Start Making Sense is also available as part of the [VA Geriatric Scholars Program Toolkit for Dementia](#). Madison Wisconsin VA and San Antonio VA have further implemented this training to accommodate specific learners and needs. Dr. Echt continues to fill requests for the training package. To learn more, contact her at Katharina.Echt@va.gov.

GRECCs integrate Age Friendly into their Facilities

Age-Friendly Health Systems is an initiative of [The John A. Hartford Foundation](#) and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), in partnership with the [American Hospital Association \(AHA\)](#) and the [Catholic Health Association of the United States \(CHA\)](#). The goal of the initiative is to rapidly spread the 4Ms Framework to U.S. hospitals and health care systems. Age-Friendly Health Systems aim to:

- Follow an essential set of evidence-based practices
- Cause no harm
- Align with What Matters to the older adult and their family caregivers

Of the twenty Veteran Health Administration's (VHA) GRECCs, thirteen of them have integrated age-friendly principles into one or more areas to become certified as an Age-Friendly Health System. This included providing a set of four evidence-based elements of high-quality care, known as the "4Ms," to all older adults in a health care system including What Matters, Medication, Mentation and Mobility. To learn more, contact Kimberly.Church@va.gov.

