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

...what follows is a small sampling from among the hundreds of research investigations currently underway in VHA’s Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center.

Ann Arbor GRECC: Antipsychotic Use in Parkinson’s disease patients. Use of antipsychotics (APs) in Parkinson’s disease (PD) is common. Noting the high rate at which persons with PD experience psychosis and dementia, investigators at the Ann Arbor GRECC hypothesized that use of APs placed patients at elevated risk for mortality. Multivariate analysis of a Veterans Health Administration database of PD patients revealed that antipsychotic users had more than twice the risk of death as observed in a matched group of non-users. The commonly used atypical antipsychotics identified during the study were olanzapine, risperidone, and quetiapine. This work highlights the need for caution when prescribing atypical antipsychotics to PD patients and the importance of always considering non-pharmacologic strategies in managing psychosis. To learn more about this research, contact Dr. Helen C. Kales at helen.kales@va.gov.

Little Rock GRECC: Nutrient Intake and Hospitalization. Older Veterans often become severely malnourished during hospitalization, leading to a range of complications and a higher risk of mortality. To prevent this from happening, inpatient programs need to closely monitor each patient’s nutrient intake. Yet most hospitals are not adequately staffed to do this. The Little Rock GRECC developed and studied a novel means for completing daily patient nutrient intake assessments in less than one-third the time required by traditional methods, and the new approach was found to be more accurate as well. The greater ease and improved accuracy facilitates identification of patients at elevated risk for becoming malnourished. Anyone interested in this new approach to assessing nutrient intake can contact Dennis H. Sullivan, MD at dennis.sullivan@va.gov.

San Antonio GRECC: Proteins Block Neuronal Death. A number of aging-related neurological diseases such as stroke, Lou Gehrig’s disease, and Alzheimer's disease, involve the death of neurons in the brain. The San Antonio GRECC recently described ferroptosis, a previously unrecognized mechanism of neuronal death. Even more exciting, the investigators identified a protein that disrupts this mechanism. Enhancing the activity and delivery of this protein might be a new approach for supporting healthy brain aging. To find out more about this work, contact Dr. Nicolas Musi at Nicolas.musi@va.gov.

Gainesville GRECC: Multi-sensory (MSE) Environments for Bathing Veterans with Dementia

For veterans with dementia, and CLC staff, bathing can be a traumatic experience. Bathing in the CLC is commonly provided in large, cold communal bathing environments with standing-height tubs at various times of the day by a workforce that experiences constant turn over. Nothing about the experience resembles the relaxing experience typically found at home in their own environment. As a result the patient may become agitated, making bathing difficult.

There is much debate regarding the best possible methods to manage agitation during assisted bathing. Non-pharmacological interventions are the preferred first line of treatment because pharmacological interventions care expensive, unsafe and unsuccessful.

Investigators at the Gainesville GRECC and the UF Colleges of Education and Design, Construction & Planning are conducting a study of multisensory environment (MSE) stimulation during bathing in patients residing in the dementia unit in the CLC at Lake City VAMC. The MSE stimulation is tailored to each patient and can include sight (light), sound (music), olfaction (aromatherapy), and touch (tactile).

If successful, this approach could improve patient and staff satisfaction hygiene and hygiene among CLC patients with Dementia.

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