



Community Engagement Quarterly

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OF THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND
CENTER FOR COMPASSIONATE
INNOVATION

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Summer Edition

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Office of Community Engagement

The Office of Community Engagement (OCE) serves as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships that benefit Veterans and their families.

OCE is a facilitator and an entry point for public and private entities interested in partnering with VHA in the service of Veterans.

Center for Compassionate Innovation

The Center for Compassionate Innovation (CCI)'s mission is to enhance Veterans' health and well-being by exploring emerging therapies that are safe and ethical after traditional treatments have not been successful.

Feature Harnessing the Power of Innovative Tools to Improve Delivery of Care to Veterans

The Center for Compassionate Innovation (CCI) is exploring innovative treatments and spearheading new methods of connecting with internal and external stakeholders. With modern technology and security improvements for data saved in the Cloud, CCI optimized its proposal submission process by developing a publicly available site where proposals can be submitted online. Proposal submitters can now communicate with CCI directly to share new interventions and novel applications of currently available treatments used for different purposes, diagnoses, or populations.

CCI explores emerging therapies that are safe and ethical to enhance Veteran physical and mental well-being when other treatments have not been successful. CCI is particularly interested in innovations that address suicide prevention, traumatic brain injury (TBI), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and chronic pain.

CCI's proposal submission portal is the first of its kind within VA. Now all external stakeholders including Veterans, community providers, and treatment developers in the private healthcare industry can share details about novel treatment modalities with just a few clicks.

CCI Proposal Details

The screenshot shows a web form titled "CCI Proposal Details". It includes fields for "Primary Point of Contact (POC) Salutation", "POC First Name", "POC Last Name", "POC Phone Number", and "POC Email". There is a "Proposed Innovation Description" field with a rich text editor toolbar. A "Proposal Description" section contains a "Proposal Title" field and a "Brief Proposal Summary" field with a note: "Maximum of 250 words. Please include the target". A red vertical bar on the right side of the form indicates required information.

Not only is the proposal portal easy to use and easy to access, the site is also secure so that any proprietary information shared with CCI is protected. The site also has many automated features that allow CCI staff to receive and review proposal details and follow up with proposal submitters quickly and efficiently. Additional enhancements are planned as VA continues to implement novel solutions to improve customer service. The CCI submission portal is just one of the many examples of how VA is harnessing the power of innovative tools to improve the delivery of healthcare to Veterans. (Continued next page)

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You can help support VA's commitment to providing the best healthcare possible to Veterans by submitting a proposal to CCI. Through collaboration, partnership and the relentless pursuit of innovative healthcare, we all can help Veterans achieve their optimal health and well-being. Proposals can be submitted at: <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/CCISubmitaProposal.asp>.

By *Christie Eickhoff, M.A.*

Exploring Innovative Use of Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation for Posttraumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can have a profound impact on the lives of many Veterans. According to results from the National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study, the prevalence of lifetime and current PTSD in the U.S. Veteran population is 8.0% and 4.8% respectively. Based on the number of Veterans reported in the 2015 American Community Survey, more than 1.5 million Veterans meet criteria for a PTSD diagnosis during their lifetime. In 2013, the Congressional Research Service reported that the estimated number of Veterans enrolled in VA health care with a diagnosis associated with TBI exceeds 200,000. However, the total number of Veterans who have experienced TBI is not known. Veterans with a history of TBI and PTSD may face many challenges on their journey to restoring their health including increased risk of substance use, chronic pain, depression and suicidal ideation.

The Center for Compassionate Innovation (CCI) is exploring more ways to help Veterans with PTSD and TBI. CCI has received multiple proposals for a variety of Electroencephalogram (EEG) guided Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) treatment protocols for Veterans with these conditions and is working with clinicians in the field to explore their effectiveness. All of these treatments use EEG to develop and guide the delivery of magnetic stimulation to areas of the brain. The treatment is non-invasive and has relatively few, minor, and short-lived side-effects that include headache or dizziness immediately following the treatment.

TMS devices have been reviewed by the FDA and are cleared to treat conditions that include depression. However, TMS devices are not currently cleared for PTSD and TBI.

Clinicians may recommend this treatment for off-label use in cases where they deem it medically appropriate and the patient agrees with the course of treatment. TMS devices are already available at some VA medical centers and additional devices are being rolled-out at more locations throughout 2017. In addition, there is ongoing clinical research in VA to examine outcomes associated with TMS for Veterans with PTSD and TBI. Preliminary results suggest that TMS treatment may be effective in treating PTSD and TBI in the Veteran population.

In the words of one Army Veteran, James Buckley, who received treatment for PTSD at the Providence VA Medical Center, TMS "has helped considerably." Mr. Buckley qualified for a study being conducted at the Providence VA by psychiatrist and clinical researcher, Dr. Noah Philip. Mr. Buckley shared his experience with CCI, explaining that he started noticing a positive effect soon after the first treatment. He noticed improved sleep after a few days, stating, "I noticed immediately that my life was a little bit lighter and a little bit brighter."

CCI continues to work with innovators throughout the nation to explore emerging therapies for a small population of Veterans who have not found success with traditional treatments. Through bold pursuit and collaboration, new treatment options are becoming available to Veterans enrolled with VA so that they can achieve their health goals.

By *Christie Eickhoff, M.A.*



A Veteran at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center receives a TMS treatment

¹ Wisco et. al. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in the US Veteran Population: Results From the National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study. *J Clin Psychiatry* 2014;75(12):1338-1346

² https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Veterans_2015.pdf

³ http://www.ncsl.org/documents/statefed/health/TBI_Vets2013.pdf

Light therapy offers unique treatment option for Veterans with TBI

Light Emitting Diodes (LED's) are electronic semiconducting devices that emit light when charged with electrical voltage. These lights may reduce symptoms of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and/or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This innovative technology is currently being investigated by researchers at the VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS). They received a VA-sponsored grant to investigate the effectiveness of using LED light therapy with Veterans who suffer from cognitive problems associated with their service during the Gulf War.

Although the exact mechanism is unclear, it is thought that light therapy has a healing and rejuvenating cellular response. This is due, in part, to increased blood flow to the treated area and increased production of adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which transports energy within cells for metabolism. Early studies on mice and other laboratory animals demonstrated the benefits of light therapy.

Near infrared light spectrum is a type of light with a wavelength between 600 and 1200 nanometers (nm). It does not produce heat, does not damage the skin, and cannot be sensed by the user.

LED light therapy is a form of photobiostimulation that is thought to penetrate deeply into the tissue in order to reach the site of injury. While the exact mechanism of near infrared light therapy is not fully understood, the evidence available is compelling and warrants

consideration or clinical use in a subset of patients for whom evidence-based therapies have been unsuccessful or suboptimal. Near infrared light therapy is noninvasive, has few side effects, and is well tolerated by most patients.

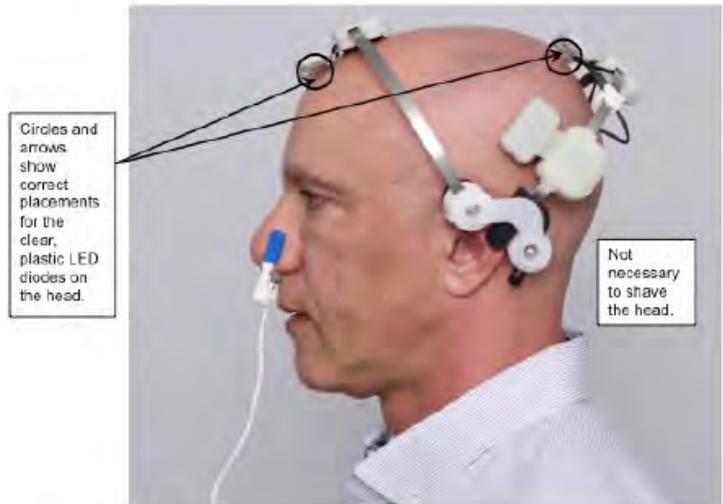


Photo: The LED devices that will be used in the Boston clinical demonstration project



Photo: A researcher at the Boston VAMC wearing another LED device.

The mission of the Center for Compassionate Innovation is to explore emerging therapies that are safe and ethical to enhance Veteran physical and mental well-being when other treatments have not been successful. Given this mission, CCI partnered with the VABHS to offer support and guidance related to offering LED light therapy to a subset of Veteran enrolled in care at the VABHS. Internal and external stakeholders are committed to providing innovative, effective and safe treatments for those with a prolonged recovery from TBI.

This technology may present an opportunity to provide Veterans with PTSD and/or TBI symptoms who have not responded to other treatments the option of LED therapy while under supervision by their VA healthcare team. Of note, providers in the VA Boston Healthcare System are interested in making this low risk intervention available for home use, which may be especially beneficial to Veterans living significant distances from their Boston VA healthcare facility or where travel to multiple treatment appointments may be a significant barrier to care.

LED therapy is an example of the VA's commitment to providing expanded treatment options to Veterans who continue to suffer after trying standard treatments as well as a willingness to create an environment where innovation is supported and encouraged.

By Alyssa Adams, PsyD

VA Recognizes Top Entries for 2017 Veterans Health Administration Community Partnership Challenge

The Office of Community Engagement hosted its fourth annual Community Partnership Challenge in May 2017. This year's theme was *Collaborating with Community Partners to Prevent Suicide Amongst Veterans 50 Years and Older*. It promoted the efforts of VA Medical Centers' innovative and proactive approaches to prevent and eliminate Veteran death by suicide. VA relies on partnerships with community organizations to help identify at-risk Veterans to implement effective intervention strategies.

The Partnerships Challenge is an opportunity to highlight successful nonmonetary partnerships between VA healthcare facilities and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that provide services to Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. This year's winners demonstrate the importance of an entire community's responsibility to support Veterans and prevent suicide.

The VA Connecticut Healthcare System is working to prevent suicide in older Veterans by partnering with Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging's CHOICES program (Connecticut's programs for Health insurance, Outreach, Information and Eligibility Screening). The CHOICES program helps to connect older adults with community resources and healthcare benefits by providing telephonic and face-to-face assistance from trained staff and volunteers. CHOICES staff and volunteers are in a unique position to encounter older adults, many who may be Veterans struggling with mental health concerns or thoughts of self-harm. Through screening, trained CHOICES staff and volunteers identify Veterans who may be in crisis and are able to provide the resources available in the community.



Photo: Winners of the Community Partnership Challenge at the Albany VAMC.

The **Albany Stratton VA Medical Center** partners with Veterans Service Agencies and Faith-Based Organizations to prevent suicides in older Veterans. This partnership provides training sessions presented collaboratively by the VA chaplain and the VA suicide prevention team, addressing spirituality and mental health to faith based organization (FBO) leaders. In addition, gunlock packets containing a gunlock with Veterans Crisis Line Sticker and gun safety information are also provided to each FBO. At the conclusion of the training, FBO leaders are asked to share the information learned and resources provided during the training with their congregations and communities. Currently, more than 250 community leaders have received this training. The efforts of this partnership have resulted in increased referrals to the Veterans Crisis Line and 500 gunlocks distributed.

The **Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center** in Charleston, SC, partners with local law enforcement agencies to train first responders in their "Mental Illness, Violence Risk and Interface Strategies." The training will help first responders recognize Veteran-specific needs and identify symptomatic behaviors, risk factors, serious mental illness, and psychological stressors. First responders are empowered to offer support and empathy to this at-risk population and provide early intervention to prevent death by suicide. In result of the training, the stigma and the potential incarceration numbers have decreased.

The increase to the number of individuals transported to local hospitals to receive emergency mental health treatment demonstrates the positive impact of the training on Veterans in Charleston while enhancing community relations between the VA Medical Center and law enforcement agencies.

On June 28, 2017, Dr. Poonam Alaigh, the Acting Under Secretary for Health, recognized the top three facilities during a widely attended virtual awards ceremony. The leadership and front line employees and the local community partners who were involved in the partnerships were invited to

participate. Dr. Alaigh congratulated them publicly for their tremendous work, collaboration, and dedication to the mission and our Veterans. For more information about VHA partnerships, contact CommunityEngagement@va.gov.

By Tracy Weistreich, PhD, MSN, RN, NEA-BC



Photo: Neuropsychologist Dr. Mark De Santis, and psychologist Dr. James McDonagh provide mental health awareness and suicide prevention training to police departments in South Carolina and Georgia. Photo by James W. Arrowood.

Keeping Older Veterans Safe through Partnership

The Offices of Community Engagement (OCE) and Suicide Prevention partnered to develop the theme for the 2017 VHA Community Partnership Challenge. This theme, "Collaborating with Community Partners to Prevent Suicide Amongst Veterans 50 Years and Older," was chosen to highlight successful partnerships between VA and nongovernmental agencies to reduce Veteran deaths by suicide. The latest data indicates that 20 Veterans die by suicide each day; of those 20 Veterans, 14 are not actively receiving care in the VA, and a staggering 65 percent of these suicides are Veterans who are 50 years or older. There are many factors that contribute to these statistics including Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Dementia and Alzheimer's disease are progressive brain disorders that impair memory, thinking, and behavior, which can lead to a decline in cognitive and social functioning. They impact functional abilities including mood, personality, and one's capacity to think, speak, comprehend, remember, communicate, and provide basic self-care.



Individuals who have had a traumatic brain injury (TBI) or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as Veterans who have served in a combat zone, are more prone to develop dementia. A dementia diagnosis also increases an older person's risk for severe depression and suicidal behavior and is a risk factor for elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Older Veterans diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another type of dementia receiving Veteran benefits such as VA pension and compensation benefits or Aid and Attendance may be at increased risk for financial exploitation by family, caregivers, and others.

OCE is helping to prevent suicide by serving as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level. One of OCE's efforts is supporting and working to increase the number of Medical Legal Partnerships (MLPs) in VA.

In MLPs, medical facilities partner with legal practices, often bringing legal services into the medical facility. MLPs encourage a patient-centered approach to care by integrating legal services within VA healthcare to improve Veteran health. The VA currently has 20 MLPs throughout the country. These community partnerships provide legal representation to vulnerable older Veterans who have cognitive deficiencies that may impair their ability to make decisions and assist them with healthcare and financial planning, eligibility for public and VA benefits, simple wills, eviction and foreclosure, and elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.

In addition to promoting MLPs, OCE is working to increase awareness about elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation as part of a broader campaign to improve the lives of Veterans and reduce rates of suicide amongst Veterans.

By promoting and supporting MLPs, OCE is actively working to decrease the risk of Veterans becoming victims of fraud, abuse and neglect by connecting them with the legal services they need.

Additional information about elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation can be found at:

Elder Justice: <https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice>

Dementia: <http://www.alz.org/dementia/types-of-dementia.asp>

By *Jamie D. Davis, Ph.D.*

Partnering with a Purpose: 2017 National Community Mental Health Summits

The Department of Veteran Affairs is celebrating its 5th year hosting the Community Mental Health Summits. The focus of the summits is to recognize that Veteran-centered, recovery-oriented care requires engaging stakeholders in active dialogue on ways to address issues related to improving mental health care. VA recognizes that it could not accomplish the needs of Veterans and their families without collaboration and partnerships with other federal, state, and local community agencies.

In previous years, facilities focused on key areas that included patient access, suicide prevention, VA Community Care, homelessness, and Women Veterans Health Care programs. This year, suicide prevention and access to care are top priorities; facilities are focusing on their local concerns and issues around these priorities during their Summits.



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2017 Community Mental Health Summit

VA's national, state, and local partners are an integral part of the success of the Community Mental Health Summits. As VA continues to depend on the support of partners like Give-An-Hour, National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI), and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), VA has also welcomed others that include the MyVA Community Veterans Engagement Boards and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The VACO Mental Health Summit Planning Committee, consisting of representatives from VHA's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Office,

VISN 6 Mid-Atlantic Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC), Office of Community Engagement (OCE), and others, provides guidance and support to MH Summit Coordinators as well as developing the annual Mental Health Summit Toolkit.

The responses about the Mental Health Summits from VA and community have been extremely positive. Facilities are encouraged to share success stories each year that are uploaded into Pulse to encourage spread of ideas and open discussion across all VA facilities. These stories, along with the dates of local Mental Health Summits and facility coordinator information, can be accessed at <https://www.vapulse.net/groups/national-va-mental-health-summits>.

Please email vacomhsummit@va.gov additional questions about VA's Community Mental Health Summits. For additional information about strategic partnerships, please contact CommunityEngagement@va.gov.

By Fanita Jackson-Norman, LCSW

September is National Service Dog Month

CCI partnered with the Offices of Mental Health Services and Prosthetic & Sensory Aids Services to lead VA's efforts to extend the veterinary health benefit for service dogs to Veterans with a chronic impairment that substantially limits mobility and is associated with a mental health disorder. Veterans who may be eligible for the veterinary benefit for a mental health mobility service dog should make an appointment with their mental health provider to discuss. For additional information regarding the service dog veterinary benefit, please visit: <http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp>.

