



Atlanta VAHCS Research & Development Service  
*Research Quarterly*

**SPECIAL GREETING FROM DR. HART (ACOS-R)**

Calendar year 2020 brought unimagined and unprecedented challenges to our research programs. Despite these challenges, our community of research professionals responded. We shut or slowed down studies we had worked so hard to establish - studies that were sometimes weeks, months, or even years in the planning. Members of our teams volunteered for shifts screening employees and visitors coming into the facility. We gave up space that had been carefully prepared to support research studies to enable the creation of the Atlanta VA vaccine center. Many of our research teams quickly pivoted and began focusing their expertise on COVID-19 related issues. Our clinical researchers and administrative staff worked tirelessly to bring new therapeutic clinical trials to veterans to address the pandemic and did so in record time. And these are only representative contributions and accomplishments – there are many more. As we gain perspective on the past year, I’m impressed by these accomplishments. It takes passion, patience, and diligence to be successful in research, and you all have demonstrated those qualities in admirable abundance.

Thank you,  
C. Michael Hart, MD

**CONGRATULATIONS – NEW RESEARCH AWARDS!**

Dr. Anna Barrett (RR&D SPiRE): A biomarker for personalized care in post-stroke spatial neglect

Dr. Aliza Wingo (BLR&D): Clinician Scientist Investigator (CSI) Award

Dr. Aliza Wingo (BLR&D): Identifying Novel Brain Proteins Contributing to PTSD and Alcohol Use Disorder

Dr. Shanthi Srinivasan: Senior Clinician Scientist Investigator (SCSI) Award

Dr. Shanthi Srinivasan (BLR&D): Merit Renewal Mechanism of GDNF Regulation of Hepatic Steatosis

Dr. Charles Searles: Multi-Omics Approach to Identify Molecular Mechanisms Responsible for Risk and Resilience to Adverse Outcomes

Dr. Vincent Marconi: Establishment of the VHA Biorepository, VA Science and Health Initiative to Combat Infectious and Emerging Life-Threatening Diseases (VA SHIELD)

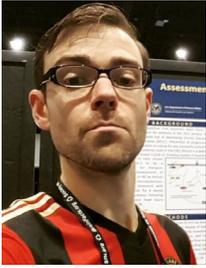
**RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION OFFICE WELCOMES**

Ashley Scales, PhD, MPH



Dr. Scales joined the Atlanta VA Research Administration Office in August 2020, as the **Administrative Officer**. Prior to joining the Atlanta VA, she served as a Health Science Specialist with the VA Palo Alto Health Care System in Palo Alto, CA, and thoroughly enjoyed her work with the Geriatrics, Research, Education & Clinical Center (GRECC) and the Cooperative Studies Coordinating Center (CSPCC). Dr. Scales earned her doctorate in Human Capital development at the University of Southern Mississippi. She completed her dissertation on “*The effects of organizational commitment and harmonious passion on voluntary turnover among social workers: A mixed methods study.*” Dr. Scales looks forward to continuing to serve the VHA Research Mission, and looks forward to improving systematic processes and growing the Research program alongside Dr. Hart.

Jonathan Fidler



Jonathan Fidler has served in the role of **Research Biosafety Officer** starting on an interim basis in April 2020 and was permanently appointed to the position in October 2020. He has been a member of the VA Research community for over 10 years, serving as an Emory WOC lab manager and technician in the Anesthesiology laboratory of Dr. Paul Garcia for nearly 7 years, then as VA staff on various traumatic brain injury animal research projects starting in 2017. Prior to his employment at Emory, Mr. Fidler received his undergraduate degree in Neurobiology from Northwestern University in Evanston, IL and worked as a Research Associate for Genzyme Corporation in Framingham, MA, primarily in the field of ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). Mr. Fidler brings nearly 20 years of laboratory research experience to the position of Biosafety Officer and seeks to serve as a conduit for active and productive communication between VA researchers and administration.

Tedra Ricks



Mrs. Tedra Ricks is the new **Administrative Assistant/Credentialing Coordinator** for the Atlanta VA Research Office and brings over 25 years of Administrative experience to the position. Tedra previously worked for Battelle, contracting with CDC. While at the CDC, Tedra worked on several CDC projects; Lab Medicine Best Practices, Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, The National Children Study and most recently worked at the CDC Biorepository in Lawrenceville. In her spare time, Tedra enjoys spending time with her family and attending Braves and Falcon games.

Clayton Carruth, MPH



Clayton Carruth is the newly appointed **Clinial Studies Center Manager**, effective March 2020. He received his MPH from Emory University and began his career at the Georgia Department of Public Health Epidemiology department conducting foodborne illnesses. While working at AVAHCs from 2013-2016, Clayton was able to lead several clinical studies and was a presenter at IWHOD in Sicily, Italy. Since then he has worked in various positions leading large scale projects in Healthcare IT for hospital systems across the US. Clayton is always willing to help research teams and encourages everyone to reach out to him as needed. When not at work, you can find Clayton maintaining his yard with his wife and daughter in Decatur.

George Lathrop Jr., DVM



Dr. Lathrop has been appointed as the new **Chief Veterinary Medical Officer** for the Atlanta VA in August 2020. Prior to joining the Atlanta VA, he was the Deputy Director of Comparative Medicine at the CDC and Co-Director of the Laboratory Animal Residency Program. Dr. Lathrop received his DVM from Oklahoma State before completing a Residency in Laboratory Animal Medicine and a Masters in Veterinary Clinical Sciences at Louisiana State University. After retiring from the US Army with over 20 years of service, he has held Director positions in Clinical Research Organizations concentrating in Toxicology, Experimental Surgery and Biocontainment. Dr. Lathrop has a distinguished career in infectious disease research and biocontainment operations.

## WELCOME NEW RESEARCHERS

Louise Hecker, PhD



Dr. Hecker's research background and training are rooted in regenerative biology and investigating mechanisms of tissue injury-repair. Regenerative biology studies the molecular and cellular processes by which tissues and organs renew or repair themselves. However, the normal healing and repair process becomes less efficient as we age. Her research is focused on understanding why this process "goes awry"

in aging and identifying novel pathways that can be targeted to reverse age-associated diseases, such as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). Hecker has held previous roles at Binghamton University, University of Michigan Medical School, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Southern Arizona Veterans Affairs Health Care System, and the University of Arizona. She received her BA from Hartwick College, MA from Binghamton University, and her MS and PhD from the University of Michigan.

Jay Patel, PhD



Dr. Jay Patel is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Orthopedics at Emory University, and a Health Science Specialist and CDA-1 Awardee at the Atlanta VA Medical Center. Originally from Northern New Jersey, Jay completed his bachelor's degree in Bioengineering at Rice University, followed by a PhD in Biomedical Engineering at Rutgers University. He then pursued a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, where he became involved with research at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. He joined the Atlanta research community in September 2020. Jay's research interests focus on the repair and regeneration of musculoskeletal soft tissues (cartilage/meniscus), specifically by tuning cell-matrix interactions and microenvironments to guide cellular behavior. He looks forward to working with all of you as he establishes an independent, VA-based research career.

## FEATURED VA RESEARCH STAFF

Svenja Illien-Junger, PhD



Dr. Illien-Junger is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Orthopedics at Emory University School of Medicine. Dr. Illien-Junger's focus is on intervertebral disc research, specifically addressing the roles of nutrition, injury, and mechanical loading on intervertebral disc degeneration and repair, and the associated cellular and molecular signaling in aging and injury related intervertebral disc degeneration. After receiving her PhD in Cellular and Biomedical Science, in Davos, Switzerland, Dr. Illien-Junger moved to the United States to pursue her research career at the Icahn School of Medicine in New York City, first as Postdoctoral Fellow and later as Assistant Professor. Dr. Illien-Junger joined the Department of Orthopedics at Emory University in August 2019. Her research labs are based at the Atlanta VA.

Maxine Mahar-Albertelli, RN



The Clinical Studies Center would like to take this opportunity to recognize the hard work and dedication of Ms. Maher-Albertelli. Maxine has been a valued Research Nurse since 2011 and has been caring for Veterans far longer. Maxine started her service in 1971 at the VAMC in St. Louis, MO, and has been with the Atlanta VA since 1980. As a Clinical Research Nurse, she has worked tirelessly with Dr. Phillip's Diabetes Research Program. Maxine has demonstrated her leadership and her dedication to providing top notch care to our Veterans. She brings years of valuable clinical experience to our team and a positive, can-do attitude that benefits all who interact with her.

## WHAT'S NEW WITH THE CVNR?

### CVNR Making a Difference for Veterans and the Community

Do you want to learn about the basics of fMRI and its use in research? Or the effects of physical activity on the brain? How about current research on neuroinflammation and Alzheimer's Disease? Have you ever wondered about the relationships between vision and diabetes, menopause, or exercise? Did you know that Atlanta VA's Research Center for Visual and Neurocognitive Rehabilitation (CVNR) has a research registry for people who are interested in participating in research? Learn about all of this and more by listening to two teams of researchers from the CVNR in an on-demand replay of

BrainTalk Live, a weekly educational series for patients and families hosted by the Goizueta Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center at Emory University. The presentations are available at <https://youtu.be/J1OIXMChh2A> and <https://youtu.be/DBDZPL3TO8A>. The CVNR at the Atlanta VA is dedicated to advancing evidence-based rehabilitation to improve Veteran health and quality of life. We are proud that CVNR researchers contribute to community education and research.

## WHAT’S GOING ON IN THE FOUNDATION FOR ATLANTA VETERANS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (FAVER)?



Special thanks to Dr. Vince Marconi (Infectious Diseases) and his team on their research testing the anti-inflammatory drug baricitinib in combination with other medications to improve the condition of hospitalized COVID-19 patients. For more information about Dr. Marconi’s findings, visit the website: <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/1220-Researchers-optimistic-about-ability-of-anti-inflammatory-drug-to-treat-COVID-19-patients.cfm>

During the first quarter in 2021, FAVER welcomed the following new employees:

Name	PI
Marina Bruck	Monica Farley
Taylor Moran	Monica Farley
Chelsea Murphy	Monica Farley
Nina Patel	Vincent Marconi/Ashish Mehta
Annabel Patterson	Monica Farley
Jovita Ramjisingh	Monica Farley
Tehquin Tanner	Vincent Marconi

### Employee Appreciation

Thank you to all FAVER employees for your contributions and dedication to the VA/FAVER research and education missions. And congratulations to the following employees celebrating anniversaries during the first quarter of 2021:

Years	Name
21-25	Jane Guidot (24 Years) Sandra Meyer (21 Years)
11-15	LaTia Dozier (13 Years) Jennifer Whelan (11 Years)
6-10	Chris Bower (9 Years) Ngoc-Anh Le (7 Years) Nikki Leslie (6 Years)
1-5	Emily Fawcett (4 Years) Shanita Shack (4 Years) Katelyn Ward (3 Years)

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

**Department of Defense:** The Fiscal Year 2021 Department of Defense Appropriations Act provides research funding for the following peer reviewed programs managed by the Department of Defense office of Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP): <https://ebrap.org/eBRAP/public/Program.htm>

\* If you are interested in submitting an application for one of these research programs, please contact Marcia Weese, [marcia.weese@va.gov](mailto:marcia.weese@va.gov) or 404.321.6111 ext. 127897.

## CENTRAL OFFICE DEADLINES

Research Service	Deadline
HSR&D LOI	04.15.2021
RR&D LOI	05.01.2021

## R&D DEADLINES

Month	HS/PO/ISSO Post-Review Deadline	R&D Submission Deadline	Meeting Date
April	03.24.2021	03.31.2021	04.07.2021
May	04.21.2021	04.28.2021	05.05.2021
June	05.19.2021	04.28.2021	05.05.2021
July	06.16.2021	06.30.2021	07.07.2021

## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Job Title	Location
Program Analyst	Clinical Studies Center (pending USA Job Posting)
Program Support Assistant	Research Administration Office (pending USA Job Posting)
FAVER Positions	<a href="#">FAVER Job Announcements</a>