

Atlanta VAHCS Research & Development Service
Research Quarterly

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO ANTONIO (TONY) LARACUENTE



It is impossible in a few paragraphs to adequately summarize the innumerable contributions that Tony Laracuento has made to the Atlanta VA Research Service. I first met Tony when I moved my research program to Atlanta in 2000 and began working with him daily when I became ACOS for Research in 2009.

After graduating from college, Tony spent a couple of years in Miami training to become an Administrative Officer before spending two years in the National VA Office of Research and Development in Washington as a Program Analyst. In September 1994 he moved to Atlanta to become the Director of Research Operations, and in December 1994 he became the inaugural Executive Director of the newly formed Atlanta Research and Education Foundation. Shortly after his arrival, he supervised the design and activation of the research space on the 4th and 5th floors of the newly constructed “clinical addition” of the Atlanta VA Medical Center. In his “spare time” he earned a Master’s Degree in Business Administration from Georgia State University. Over his 26-year tenure as Director of Research Operations, the Atlanta VA research program grew by roughly 400%.

I appreciate many things about Tony. He seemingly knew how everything worked, where everything was, knew everyone in the medical center, and always knew the process for getting things accomplished. He used that knowledge to continually strive to improve everyone and everything around him. He is without question, the most singularly talented VA employee I have ever had the pleasure to work with. His talents are not only appreciated locally, but also regionally and nationally. He recently transitioned to become a Management Analyst to the National Director of Research Operations in VA Central Office. For the time being, he will continue to live in Atlanta, and he still comes by the Research Office periodically.

To me, and I suspect to many of you, Tony has been a great friend and colleague. We plan to host a face-to-face reception for Tony in August to recognize his tremendous contributions to our facility and celebrate his many accomplishments. I hope you will be able to join us as we wish him every success in his new role.

Best,

Mike

CONGRATULATIONS – NEW RESEARCH AWARDS!

Dr. Arash Harzand (CDA-2): Enhanced Home-Based Exercise Therapy for Peripheral Arterial Disease through Mobile Health and Remote Monitoring

Drs. Badi El Osta and Nick Maurice, Atlanta Site Co-Investigators (CSP): Lung Precision Oncology Program (LPOP)

WELCOME

LaChaya Ross



I am so excited to join your team as a Program Specialist with the GREEC Program. I have been an employee with the Atlanta VA since 2007, starting as a Program Support Assistant in the Telephone Advice (TAPS) Call center. I served as a Program Specialist with Mental Health working with the Enhanced Community Partnership (ECP) Program as the financial liaison, and later transferred to the Fort McPherson Clinic to assist with clinical setup and transition of Mental Health, SATP, Primary Care, Women's Wellness, PIM Team and the H-PACT team, and also served in the MSA role. During my tenure at Fort McPherson, I was promoted to a Program Support Assistant with the Engineering Service Line and assisted with several roles until my current promotion to the Surgical Service Line as a Program Support Assistant.

In my leisure time I enjoy providing service to my clients as a Licensed Esthetician with the State of Georgia and a professional makeup artist, currently working on small films and plays. I enjoy reading, creating beauty and haircare products, dancing, and karaoke. I am a mother of two handsome, wonderful sons, my oldest a 2nd year college student and my youngest graduating high school next year to attend college. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to be a part of your team and look forward to working with you all.

FEATURED VA RESEARCH STAFF

George Beck, PhD



Dr. George R. Beck Jr. (PhD) is a Research Biologist at the Atlanta VA Medical Center and a tenured Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine at Emory University. He graduated from Temple University in 2000 with a PhD in Molecular Biology and Genetics at which time he was granted the highly competitive National Cancer Institute Scholar Award. After five years at the National Institutes of Health he joined the Emory faculty in 2005 and joined the Atlanta VA Medical Center in 2013 as a Merit Awardee. Dr. Beck's research program is centered on generating novel treatments for Veterans with bone loss and associated with disease.

The human skeleton performs numerous functions critical to overall health. A decline in bone health, which can occur in response to disease, medical treatment, or simple aging, can lead to serious health issues, including increased risk of fracture. The most serious, hip fractures, may cause prolonged or permanent disability and almost always require hospitalization and major surgery. Therefore, prevention of fractures represents a significant health intervention that may improve longevity and quality of life in the aging veteran population.

To address this problem, Dr. Beck at the Atlanta VA is investigating new approaches for improving bone health and preventing bone decay. Phosphorus and calcium are the two building blocks of bone and Dr. Beck is striving to understand the effects of altered phosphorus to calcium ratios on bone quality and if these levels can be manipulated to improve bone health. He has found that increasing the phosphorus to calcium ratio, which can occur through dietary choices or declining kidney function, negatively impacts bone, and generates a low grade chronic inflammatory state including increased inflammatory Th17 cell populations in the bone marrow. In contrast reducing phosphorus intake improves the phosphorus to calcium ratio as well as bone density. Dr. Beck is currently investigating strategies to improve the phosphorus to calcium ratios to both improve bone health but also fracture repair through natural means such as diet manipulation but also therapeutic strategies such as intestinal phosphate binders.



Manjula Viggeswarapu received her PhD from Osmania University in India and did a post-doctorate at the Cleveland Clinic in Cardiovascular Biology. She joined the Department of Orthopedics at Emory University in 1997 and the Atlanta VAMC in 2016 as part of the laboratory of Dr. George Beck. She has been located at the Atlanta VAMC since 1997 and has been an important part of four different VA Merit projects. The focus of her work has been bone metabolism and orthopedics and she has extensive knowledge of bone biology and a wide range of methodologies associated with studying the skeleton. She is currently leading the investigation of understanding how phosphate can be manipulated to benefit bone and fracture healing as part of the Beck lab.

WHAT'S NEW WITH THE CVNR?

The CVNR is pleased to report that they there were 1 of 8 sites featured in ORD's Research Week Recap webpage (<https://www.research.va.gov/researchweek/photos.cfm>). Thank you all for pulling together to come up with the concepts, participants, and scheduling the photo shots in a short amount of time. The VACO ORD public affairs team has our number now and they like our work, so they've already asked for follow-up items.

This is great exposure for the Center, and it was truly a team effort! Thank you!!

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



In Memoriam – Robert J. Pollet, MD, PhD

We are deeply saddened to announce the passing of Dr. Robert J. Pollet on Tuesday, April 27th, with his family by his side. Dr. Pollet was a founding Board member of the Foundation for Atlanta Veterans Education and Research, Inc. (formerly known as the Atlanta Research and Education Foundation, Inc.) and served as the President of the Board from July 17, 1989 through May 12, 2016. Dr. Pollet played an instrumental role in the success and growth of the Foundation. He also served as the Atlanta Associate Chief of Staff for Research for over twenty years. As a physician-scientist and leader,

Dr. Pollet successfully advocated for and grew the Atlanta VA Research Program and promoted the careers of innumerable VA scientists. A memorial tribute to Dr. Pollet will be announced in the near future.

Did you Know?

Did you know that FAVER displays a collection of featured research projects on its website? On a biannual basis, FAVER updates the featured projects displayed on its website to promote some of the high-quality investigators and their programs at the Atlanta VA. Please visit <https://faver.foundation> or <https://faver.foundation/latest-news/featured-projects/> to view some of the exciting work conducted by your colleagues at our VA. FAVER also maintains an archive of previous versions of the featured projects. To view the Previously Featured Projects, please visit <https://faver.foundation/latest-news/previously-featured-projects/>.

Greetings to New Faces

During the 2nd quarter in 2021, FAVER welcomed the following new employees:

Name	PI
Christine "Bianca" Garnett	Gautum Kumar
Grayson Kallas	Monica Farley
Leyla Karimzadeh	Millie Astin
Brenda Lankford	Heather Bloom/Rajesh Sachdeva
Madeline Lewis	Monica Farley
Radhika "Rady" Mungara	Larry Phillips
Zachary Oberholtzer	Monica Farley

Aubrey Selamu-Bell
Tamsin Smith

Monica Farley
Monica Farley

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 2nd quarter of 2021:

Years	Name
21-25	Lisa Lefebvre (22 Years) Colleen Oliver (21 Years)
11-15	Lewis Perry (12 Years) Christopher Simmons (15 Years) Marcia Weese (13 Years)
5-10	Maxine Maher-Albertelli (10 Years)
1-5	Johanna Boers (3 Years) Abigail "Abby" Burns (4 Years) Andrea "Annie" Coffin (1 Year) Julie Costello (5 Years) Robin Dhonau (2 Years) Eric Evans (1 Year) Dana Goodenough (5 Years) Carolyn "Carly" Mackey (2 Years) Karelys Parada (5 Years) Risha Patel (4 Years) Taressa Sergent (5 Years) Erica Taylor (2 Years) Marcus Taylor (4 Years) Elizabeth "Liz" Tibus (2 Years) Ashley Tunson (2 Years)

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

FAVER has added a new resource for PIs on its website, Extramural Funding Opportunities (<https://faver.foundation/pi-resources/funding-opportunities/>). This page provides links to non-VA funded grant opportunities.

If you are interested in submitting an application/proposal through FAVER, please contact Marcia Weese, marcia.weese@va.gov or 404.321.6111 ext. 127897.

If you want to learn more about FAVER, visit www.faver.foundation or contact Leslie Hughes, lhughes@faver.foundation or 404.321.6111 ext. 122535.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Wingo AP*, Liu Y, Gerasimov ES, Gockley J, Logsdon BA, Duong DM, Dammer EB, Robins C, Epstein MP, de Jager PL, Lah, JJ, Bennett DA, Seyfried NT, Levey AI, Wingo TS*. Integrating human brain proteomes with genome-wide association data implicates new proteins in Alzheimer's disease pathogenesis. Nature Genetics, 2021 Feb;53(2):143-146. PMID: 33510477.

Wingo TS*, Liu Y, Gerasimov ES, Gockley J, Logsdon BA, Duong DM, Dammer EB, Lori A, Kim PJ, Ressler KJ, Epstein MP, de Jager PL, Lah, JJ, Bennett DA, Seyfried NT, Levey AI, **Wingo AP***. Brain proteome-wide association study implicates novel proteins in depression pathogenesis. Nature Neuroscience, 2021 (scheduled to be published on 4/12/21).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BLR&D & CSRD Fall 2021 grant application documents for
R&D review

12:00 PM EST
08.11.2021

The Research Office has officially rolled out VAIRRS/IRBNet, guidance can be found on the research website - [Research - IRBNet/VAIRRS Guidance - Atlanta VA Health Care System](#).

Per the Chief Research and Development Officer, As of Monday, June 14, 2021, this ad hoc COVID-19 publication notification policy will no longer be in effect. The need for special early notification no longer exists, and ORD has determined it can now rely on the regular [publication notification process](#) for any COVID-related items.

CENTRAL OFFICE DEADLINES

Research Service	Deadline
New BLR&D & CSR&D LOI Proposals	11.01.2021
*These LOI's will permit an application to be submitted in the Spring 2022 cycle. Available RFAs can be found at http://vawww.research.va.gov/funding/rfa.cfm	
RR&D LOI	05.01.2021

R&D DEADLINES

Month	HS/PO/ISSO Post-Review Deadline	R&D Submission Deadline	Meeting Date
August	07.21.2021	07.28.2021	08.04.2021
September	08.18.2021	08.25.2021	09.01.2021
October	09.22.2021	09.29.2021	10.06.2021
November	10.20.2021	10.27.2021	11.03.2021

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Job Title	Location
Program Analyst (GS 7/9)	Clinical Studies Center (This position will be posted NLT July 3, 2021)
Program Support Assistant (GS 5)	Research Administration Office (https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/605498800)
Budget Analyst (GS 9/11)	Research Administration Office (https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/605290500)
FAVER Positions	FAVER Job Announcements