

Atlanta VAHCS Research & Development Service
Research Quarterly

SPECIAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Leslie Hughes



The research and educational programs of the Atlanta VA, as well as those of many other VA facilities, are supported by non-profit corporations (NPC). The Atlanta Research and Education Foundation (AREF) was founded in 1989 and recently underwent a name change to the Foundation for Atlanta Veterans Education and Research (FAVER). FAVER is a member of the National Association of Veterans Research and Education Foundations (NAVREF).

In September 2021 at the awards event of the NAVREF annual meeting, Leslie Hughes, Executive Director of FAVER, was honored with the NAVREF Board of Directors Award. This award recognized Ms. Hughes long-term contributions to support research and education for Veterans. Her leadership supporting new executive directors through the NAVREF Mentorship Program was specifically recognized. She is widely regarded as a thought leader within NAVREF and serves as a distinguished presenter at many NAVREF meetings.

Congratulations to Leslie Hughes Recipient of the 2021 NAVREF Board of Directors Award

Leslie is a Cum Laude graduate of the Georgia State University Managerial Sciences Program. She initially joined AREF in 1999 as an administrative assistant before becoming the Senior Grants Manager in 2000. She then became the Chief Operating Officer in 2009 and became the FAVER Executive Director in 2011.

Brandy Wade, PhD



Dr. Brandy Wade is a technology transfer specialist for the [Technology Transfer Program](#) (TTP), part of [VA’s Office of Research and Development](#). She also cofounded and directs [Science for Georgia](#), nonprofit organization. Wade’s self-taught tricks for learning complex topics supported her learning long past primary school through an Emory University PhD program in genetics and molecular biology and her postdoctoral fellowships at Emory and the Atlanta VA Medical Center.

And, she says, the learning tools that helped her unravel intricate scientific concepts also made it easier for her to communicate science to non-scientists. Having pinpointed this talent and identifying a lack of effective courses on how to communicate science, Wade set about creating Science for Georgia. She launched it in 2018 with the mission “to improve communication between scientists and the public, increase public engagement with science, and advocate for the responsible use of science in public policy.” Continue reading her story [here](#).

Anna Woodbury, MD



Congratulations to Dr. Anna Woodbury, a 2021 recipient of the Emory School of Medicine Mentoring Award. The award recognizes Dr. Woodbury’s outstanding mentoring and leadership to trainees and junior clinicians in the areas of education, service or research. "Training our next generation of clinicians is a critical part of academic medicine," said Dr. Woodbury who serves as an anesthesiologist and pain physician researcher in our Center for Visual and Neurocognitive Rehabilitation. “I am deeply honored to receive this prestigious award.”

WELCOME AND RE-INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS

Kallie Medbery



Kallie Medbery is the new Science Information Officer (SIO) for the Atlanta VA Research Office. She has worked in the Research Office through FAVER and the VA since 2011. She has essentially grown up in the Research Office having started here in a part-time role during her freshman year of undergrad and moving to full-time and a new role after graduation. She now lives on the Southside of Atlanta with her husband, 4 year old son and Beagle. You may have worked with her previously in one of her various roles as the SIO Assistant, Research Credentialing Officer or R&D Coordinator. As the new SIO, she plans to continue to work with her colleagues to harmonize review and submissions processes between the HRRP and the SRS, IACUC, and R&D Committees. She will continue to improve internal procedures and guidance related to the new software (IRBNet) and work to integrate more outside processes into the system to make it as seamless as possible for teams. Please feel free to reach out to Kallie with any suggestions for improvement in the Science Information Office or just to introduce yourself!

Juanita Grant



Juanita Grant is the new Research Budget Analyst. She is a Veteran who proudly served 8 years in the US Navy. She received her undergrad from Georgia Southern University in health and Human Sciences and her Masters from Walden University in Health Informatics. She joined the Atlanta VA in 2011 as a Medical Support Assistant. As time progressed, she filled the position as a Program Support Assistant (PSA) at Fort McPherson CBOC in conjunction with Morehouse School of Medicine to assist in the administration section of clinical setup for the Women's Center of Excellence (WCOE) program. She joined the Research Department as a Purchasing Agent in 2016 and has streamlined a number of processes that we use today to submit purchase orders. In her leisure time, she enjoys traveling stateside and abroad, spending time with her grandchildren, and gardening. She greatly appreciates the opportunity to be a part of such a dynamic team and looks forward to working with each and every one of you.

Laurence Hughes



Laurence Hughes is the new Research Program Support Assistant. He was born and raised in Saginaw, Michigan and he has also lived in Florida and New Mexico. In June he celebrated 10 years of marriage and has four children ranging in age from 8-19. Before joining the federal government, he spent a number of years as a restaurant manager. In his free time, he enjoys going to the gym, riding his motorcycle, and playing Playstation.

FEATURED VA RESEARCH STAFF

Samantha Yeligar, PhD



Dr. Samantha Yeligar, M.S., Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Medicine in Emory University's Division of Pulmonary, Allergy, Critical Care, and Sleep Medicine. Dr. Yeligar obtained her B.S. in Biochemistry with an emphasis in Biology from the University of California, Riverside in Riverside, CA. She obtained her M.S. (thesis project: gene expression profiling of anticancer agents in the treatment of leukemia and lymphoma) and Ph.D. (dissertation project: elucidating the molecular mechanisms of liver inflammation and injury in alcoholic liver disease) in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, CA. For her postdoctoral training, Dr. Yeligar joined the laboratories of Dr. Lou Ann Brown, Ph.D. (Emory University), and Dr. C. Michael Hart, M.D. (Atlanta VA Health Care System; AVAHCS) to investigate the molecular mechanisms that contribute to alcohol-induced lung injury and immune dysfunction. Dr. Yeligar has been funded by F32, K99/ROO, and RO1 grants from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and she currently leads a robust research program in the AVAHCS on the project entitled "Alcohol-induced mitochondrial derangements cause alveolar macrophage dysfunction" which aims to improve immunity against respiratory infections in people with a history of alcohol use disorders. At the AVAHCS, Dr. Yeligar maintains active collaborations with numerous investigators; mentors graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty; and serves on committees that enhance veteran-centered research initiatives.

Kathryn Crotty



Kathryn Crotty is a 3rd year PhD candidate in the Emory University Molecular and Systems Pharmacology graduate program. Kathryn obtained her B.S. in Physical Science from Florida State University in Tallahassee, FL where she completed an individual research project quantifying relative neuronal counts in a rat model of temporal lobe epilepsy. Kathryn joined Dr. Samantha Yeligar's lab in May 2020 and recently received F31 funding from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to conduct research on the project entitled "Effects of alcohol-induced dysregulation of lung hyaluronic acid". The objectives of Kathryn's project are to elucidate the molecular mechanisms by which chronic alcohol induces changes in hyaluronic acid dynamics in the alveolar macrophage and to determine whether these alterations impact energy metabolism that is needed for engulfing and clearing respiratory pathogens. In addition, Kathryn has received travel awards and several invitations to present her findings at national scientific conferences.

WHAT'S NEW WITH THE CVNR?

Dr. Keith McGregor relocated to the Atlanta CVNR from the Gainesville, FL VA in 2012. In his 9 years in Atlanta, he has contributed so much to the CVNR's Neuroimaging, TMS, and Telehealth initiatives, the Outreach & Education Committee, and the Internal Steering Group (to name a few). He has also transitioned to a senior VA scientist, with 2 RR&D Merit awards, a SPiRE, and a DOD grant. Dr. McGregor has been selected as Director of Research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in the Department of Clinical and Diagnostic Sciences. He has also accepted a position at the Birmingham VA in the GRECC. He'll be transitioning to his new position (and city) Nov 1, 2021.

Three researchers from the Atlanta VA Center for Visual and Neurocognitive Rehabilitation were recognized by the Emory University School of Medicine in honor of 2021 Researcher Appreciation Day. The recognition is awarded for groundbreaking research, new technologies, and innovative ideas in research and awardees are selected by peer nomination. Congratulations (pictured left to right) to Dr. Anna Woodbury for her work in complimentary therapies to treat pain in veterans with fibromyalgia and gulf war illness; Dr. Sheila Rauch for her study of pain and PTSD in the veteran population; and Dr. Madeleine Hackney for use of dance-based exercise to improve motor, cognitive, and psychosocial impairments in older adults with neurodegenerative conditions. A link to the full description of their honor is located at: [2021 Researcher Appreciation Day | Emory School of Medicine](#)



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

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 1st quarter in FY22, FAVER welcomed the following new employees:

| Name | PI |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Jennifer Gillespie | Dr. Monica Farley |
| Brittany Martin | Dr. Gautam Kumar |
| Savitha Shivaraj | Dr. Gautam Kumar |
| Telclemicael Tewolde | Dr. Gautam Kumar |
| Kristopher Weekes | Dr. George Lathrop |

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 1st quarter of FY22:

| Years | Name |
|-------|--|
| 21-25 | Leslie Hughes (22 Years) Linda Skinner Frazier (21 Years) |
| 16-20 | James McNeill (20 Years) |
| 11-15 | Ellen Schneider (15 Years) |
| 5-10 | Tasha "Stephanie" Raines (8 Years) Carol Ann White (6 Years) |
| 1-5 | Stacy Carswell (4 Years) Katherine "Gracie" Chambers (1 year) Rachel Davis (2 years) Taylor Eisenstein (1 Year) Julia Gallini (2 Years) Torrey Knight (1 Year) Perry McDaniel (4 Years) Ana Messa Restreop (1 Year) Allison Pall (2 Years) Andrew Revis (2 Years) Alison Roebing (1 Year) Gillian Smith (3 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.

CONGRATULATIONS – NEW RESEARCH AWARDS!

- Dr. AM Barrett (RRD Merit): Prism adaptation treatment (PAT) for right brain stroke rehabilitation
- Dr. Mabelle Pardue (RRD Merit): Treating early stage diabetic retinopathy
- Dr. Manuel Yepes (BLRD Merit): TPA Protects thye Synapse of the Ischemic Brain
- Dr. Lawrence Phillips (BLRD Merit): Diabetic Complications and Genetic Variants in the Million Veterans Program
- Dr. Jack Arbiser (BLRD Merit): Ceramide Analog Control of Cutaneous Inflammation
- Dr. Nicholas Maurice (BLRD CDA2): Novel Therapies Targeting Mitochondrial Pathways in Lung Epithelial Response to *S. Pneumoniae* Infection
- Dr. Didier Merlin (BLRD Merit): PepT1-/- Microbiota Therapy as a Treatment for Colitis
- Dr. Jay Patel (RRD CDA2): Matrix-Reinforcing and Cell-Instructive Smart Hydrogel for Cartilage Preservation

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Effectiveness of COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines Against COVID-19-Associated Hospitalization - Five Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, United States, February 1-August 6, 2021. Bajema KL, Dahl RM, Prill MM, Meites E, Rodriguez-Barradas MC, Marconi VC, Beenhouwer DO, Brown ST, Holodniy M, Lucero-Obusan C, Rivera-Dominguez G, Morones RG, Whitmire A, Goldin EB, Evener SL, Tremarelli M, Tong S, Hall AJ, Schrag SJ, McMorrow M, Kobayashi M, Verani JR, Surie D; SUPERNOVA COVID-19; Surveillance Group; Surveillance Platform for Enteric and Respiratory Infectious Organisms at the VA (SUPERNOVA) COVID-19 Surveillance Group. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2021 Sep 17;70(37):1294-1299. doi: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7037e3. PMID: 34529636
- Moazzami, K., Garcia, M., Young, A., Almuwaqqat, Z., Lima, B. B., Martini, A., Alkhalaf, M., Shah, A. J., Goldstein, F. C., Hajjar, I., Levey, A. I., Bremner, J. D., Quyyumi, A. A., & Vaccarino, V. (2021). Association between symptoms of psychological distress and cognitive functioning among adults with coronary artery disease. *Stress and Health*, 2021 Aug, 37(3), 538-546. doi:10.1002/smi.3018.
- Vaccarino, V., Huang, M., Wang, Z., Hui, Q., Shah, A. J., Goldberg, J., Smith, N., Kaseer, B., Murrah, N., Levantsevych, O. M., Shallenberger, L., Driggers, E., Bremner, J. D., & Sun, Y. V. (2021). Epigenetic age acceleration and cognitive decline: A twin study. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences*, 2021 Sep 13, 76(10), 1854-1863. doi:10.1093/gerona/glab047.
- Shah, A. J., Wittbrodt, M. T., Bremner, J. D., & Vaccarino, V. (2021). Cardiovascular pathophysiology from the cardioneural perspective and its clinical applications. *Trends in Cardiovascular Medicine*, S1050-1738(21)00031-1(in press). doi:10.1016/j.tcm.2021.03.001.
- Huang, M., Bliwise, D. L., Hall, M. H., Johnson, D. A., Sloan, R. P., Shah, A., Goldberg, J., Ko, Y. A., Murrah, N., Levantsevych, O. M., Shallenberger, L., Abdulbagki, R., Bremner, J. D., & Vaccarino, V. (2021). Association of depressive symptoms with sleep disturbance: A co-twin control study. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, (in press), kaab040. doi:10.1093/abm/kaab040.
- Bremner, J. D., Wittbrodt, M. T., Gurel, N. Z., Shandhi, M. H., Gazi, A. H., Jiao, Y., Levantsevych, O. M., Huang, M., Beckwith, J., Herring, I., Murrah, N., Driggers, E. G., Ko, Y.-A., Alkhalaf, M. L., Soudan, M., Shallenberger, L., Hankus, A. N., Nye, J. A., Park, J., Woodbury, A., Mehta, P. K., Rapaport, M. H., Vaccarino, V., Shah, A. J., Pearce, B. D., & Inan, O. T. (2021). Transcutaneous cervical vagal nerve stimulation in patients with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): A pilot study of effects on PTSD symptoms and interleukin-6 response to stress. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, Dec 2021, 6(in press), 100190. doi:10.1016/j.jadr.2021.100190.
- Wittbrodt, M. T., Gurel, N. Z., Nye, J. A., Shandhi, M. H., Gazi, A. H., Shah, A. J., Pearce, B. D., Murrah, N., Ko, Y.-A., Shallenberger, L., Inan, O. T., & Bremner, J. D. (2021). Non-invasive cervical vagal nerve stimulation alters brain activity during traumatic stress in individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, in press. doi:10.1097/PSY.0000000000000987.
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- Sun, Y. V., Li, C., Hui, Q., Huang, Y., Barbano, R., Rodriguez, R., Malaty, I. A., Reich, S., Bambarger, K., Holmes, K., Jankovic, J., Patel, N. J., Roze, E., Vidailhet, M., Berman, B. D., LeDoux, M. S., Espay, A. J., Agarwal, P., Piri-Richardson, S., Frank, S. A., Ondo, W. G., Saunders-Pullman, R., Chouinard, S., Natividad, S., Berardelli, A., Pantelyat, A. Y., Brashear, A., Fox, S. H., Kasten, M., Krämer, U. M., Neis, M., Bäumer, T., Loens, S., Borsche, M., Zittel, S., Maurer, A., Gelderblom, M., Jens Volkmann, J., Odorfer, T., Kühn, A. A., Borngräber, F., König, I.

R., Cruchaga, C., Cotton, A. C., Kilic-Berkmen, G., Freeman, A., Factor, S. A., Scorr, L., Bremner, J. D., Vaccarino, V., Quyyumi, A. A., Klein, C., Perlmutter, J. S., Lohmann, K., & Jinnah, H. A. (2021). A multi-center genome-wide association study of cervical dystonia. *Movement Disorders*, (in press). doi:10.1002/mds.28732.

Gazi, A. H., Wittbrodt, M. T., Harrison, A. B., Sundararaj, S., Gurel, N. Z., Nye, J. A., Shah, A. J., Vaccarino, V., Bremner, J. D., & Inan, O. T. (2021). Robust estimation of respiratory variability uncovers correlates of limbic brain activity and transcutaneous cervical vagus nerve stimulation in the context of traumatic stress. *IEEE Transactions on Biomedical Engineering*, (in press). doi:10.1109/TBME.2021.3108135.

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Kreisberg, E., Esmaeilpour, Z., Adair, D., Khadka, N., Datta, A., Badran, B. W., Bremner, J. D., & Bikson, M. (2021). High-resolution computational modelling of the current flow in the outer ear during transcutaneous auricular Vagus Nerve Stimulation (taVNS). *Brain Stimulation*, 14(6), 1419-1430. doi:10.1016/j.brs.2021.09.001.

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Vaccarino, V., Shah, A. J., Moncayo, V., Nye, J., Piccinelli, V., Ko, Y.-A., Ma, X., Murrah, N., Shallenberger, L., Driggers, E., Levantsevych, O. M., Hammadah, M., Lima, B. B., Young, A., O'Neil, W., Alkhalaf, M., Haffar, A., Raggi, P., Goldberg, J., Garcia, E. V., Quyyumi, A. A., & Bremner, J. D. (2021). Posttraumatic stress disorder, myocardial perfusion and coronary blood flow: A longitudinal twin study. *Biological Psychiatry*, (in press).

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VA 15-20 YEAR SERVICE AWARD

| Employee | Role |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Jack Arbiser, MD | Clinician Scientist |
| Bekh Bradley-Davino, PhD | Clinician Scientist |
| Heather Bloom, PhD | Clinician Scientist |
| Suephy Chen, PhD | Research Scientist |
| Abeer Moanna, MD | Clinician Scientist |
| Lawrence Phillips, MD | CSC Medical Director |
| Sheila Rauch, PhD | Mental Health Research Director |
| Walter Royal, III, PhD | Research Scientist |
| Khadijah Shahed-Salles, PharmD | Research Pharmacist |
| Saiprakash Venkateshiah, PhD | Research Scientist |

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

| Job Title | Location |
|-----------------|---|
| FAVER Positions | FAVER Job Announcements |