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VA researchers receive nation's top award for early career scientists

On July 26, four U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers will receive the [Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers \(PECASE\)](#), which is the highest honor bestowed by the U.S. government to outstanding scientists and engineers at the beginning of their independent research careers who show exceptional promise for leadership in science and technology.

The VA awardees, [announced](#) earlier this month by the White House include: Dr. Eric Y. Chang, VA San Diego Healthcare System, San Diego, California; David J. Clark, Sc.D., Malcom Randall VA Medical Center, Gainesville, Florida; Dr. Walid Gellad, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Dr. Jason A. Wertheim, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois.

"These VA scientists have established themselves, early on, as leaders within VA and the larger scientific community," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "They are already making important contributions to our understanding of Veterans' health issues and VA is proud to have them in our ranks."

Chang was recognized for his use of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) techniques to better understand musculoskeletal diseases and injury, like [rotator cuff](#) injury. Chang and his team are looking for better ways to assess joint damage and degenerative disease.

Clark was honored for his work to improve neural control of walking in older people who experience impairment from aging, disease or nervous system injury. The goal is to develop therapies that can help older Veterans maintain their well-being as they age.

Gellad is a nationally recognized expert in medication management and policy. The award acknowledges his [work](#) to facilitate safer opioid prescribing. Much of his research has focused on high-risk Veterans who receive opioid drugs both through VA and Medicare.

Wertheim's [research](#) is focused on creating replacement tissues for diseased human organs, like the kidney and liver, through regenerative medicine techniques. His work has contributed to a better understanding of how human tissues heal, regenerate, and repair after injury.

Established in 1996, the [PECASE](#) award acknowledges contributions to the advancement of science, technology, education, and mathematics (STEM) education and to community service as demonstrated through scientific leadership, public education and community outreach.

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