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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Jan. 19, 2021

VA plays crucial role in COVID-19 treatment study

WASHINGTON — U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers and Veteran volunteers from the Atlanta and San Antonio VA medical centers were part of a recently [published study](#) that yielded crucial insights into COVID-19 treatment.

The study published Dec. 11, 2020, by the *New England Journal of Medicine*, showed the drugs baricitinib and remdesivir combined were far better at improving and reducing recovery time of COVID-19 patients than treatment with remdesivir alone.

“Safe and effective vaccines for COVID-19 are being rolled out in VA and other health care settings, but finding treatments remains crucial,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA researchers and all the Veterans who volunteer for studies are contributing to steady progress with regard to both vaccines and treatment options.”

The combined use of baricitinib, an anti-inflammatory drug, and remdesivir, an antiviral drug, has already influenced clinical practice. On Nov. 19, 2020, the [Food and Drug Administration](#) issued an [emergency use authorization](#) of the treatment in certain hospitalized adults and children, based mainly on the trial results.

The initial idea for the [National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#) (NIAID)-sponsored trial was advanced, in part, by a [research team](#) at the Atlanta VA Medical Center (VAMC). They had been studying baricitinib prior to the pandemic as a potential agent against other infectious diseases.

Among other studies on the drug, the Atlanta VA team reviewed the medical records of 15 patients with moderate to severe COVID-19 who had received daily doses of baricitinib in addition to other treatment. The addition of the drug was associated with recovery in 11 of the patients.

The [results](#) appeared June 2020 in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. The researchers interpreted the results cautiously, since the study was based on a small number of patients and was not a randomized, placebo-controlled trial. Nonetheless, the results helped lay the groundwork for the large NIAID-sponsored study that followed.

Learn more about [VA studies on COVID-19](#).

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