

SCIENCE IN SERVICE OF VETERANS

VBRI Newsletter — Spring 2022



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Welcome to Our Inaugural Issue

I am excited to welcome you to the inaugural issue of the VBRI Newsletter! This issue is being released during VA Research Week, May 16-20, 2022, themed *Science in Service of Veterans* where scientific advances for Veterans health and well-being are recognized.

In this issue, please enjoy a tour around our Research Labs and learn about the great work of our scientist community.

Sections you can expect to see in future issues:

- Lab Spotlight
- Research Project Stories
- Around the Labs
- Staff/Collaborator Highlight

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About VBRI

Veterans Bio-Medical Research Institute (VBRI) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit research and education institute affiliated with the VA New Jersey Health Care System.

History

Established in 1989, Veterans Bio-Medical Research Institute (VBRI) serves our Nation's Veterans through research and education conducted at the VA medical center in New Jersey.

Our Mission

VBRI's mission is to support research and education for Veterans in New Jersey and beyond. The goals of the research and education programs supported by VBRI are to develop innovative treatment options, advance medical science in conditions commonly experienced by Veterans, and advance the standard of care for those who bravely served in the United States military.

Website: <https://vbri.org/>

VBRI Supports Science in Service of Veterans

Who is VBRI?

Veterans Bio-Medical Research Institute (VBRI) is private non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with programs that operate within the Veterans Affairs New Jersey Health Care System (VANJHCS). With Medical Centers located in East Orange and Lyons, NJ as well as satellite outpatient clinics located in Brick, Hackensack, Hamilton, Jersey City, Morristown, Newton, Paterson, Piscataway and Tinton Falls, the VANJHCS serves over 45,000 Veterans per year. Veterans directly participate in VBRI **research and education** projects, contributing to improvement in Veterans' health and medical conditions, quality of life, and general well-being.

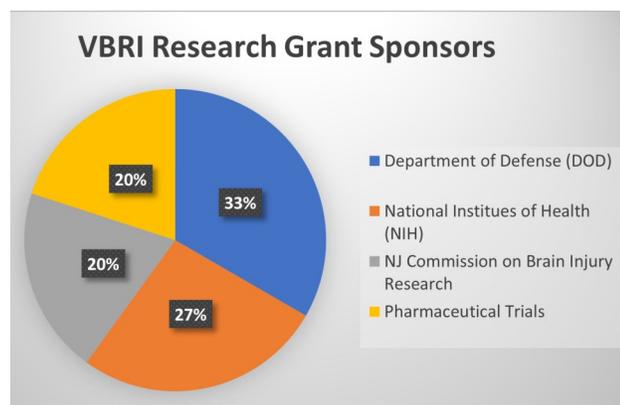
VBRI Research Programs

VBRI scientists conduct research in support of the mission of the VA to benefit the health of Veterans. Studies are conducted in both the clinical and lab settings in a wide range of areas.

VBRI's current research areas of focus include:

- ◆ Alzheimer's Disease
- ◆ Blast Exposure and Traumatic Brain Injury
- ◆ Cancer
- ◆ Diabetes
- ◆ Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
- ◆ Military Exposures and Gulf War Illness
- ◆ Neurodegenerative Diseases
- ◆ Parkinson's Disease
- ◆ Spinal Cord Injury
- ◆ Vascular Disease

VBRI supports research at VANJHCS through staffing and administration of research studies conducted at the VA medical centers in East Orange and Lyons, NJ. VBRI receives grants from federal and state government, foundations, corporations, and private donations to fund our programs.



The following pages of this issue provide a tour around our Research Labs which highlight some of our exciting current research studies. To learn more about VBRI and our programs, please visit our website: <https://vbri.org/>.

VBRI Partners with the VA New Jersey Research Service

VBRI supports research of the VA New Jersey **Research Service** Laboratories. Research focuses on Mental Health & Suicide Prevention, Military Exposures and Gulf War Illness, Precision Oncology and Brain Health.

Suicide prevention research reflects a unique combination of approaches, attacking the issue from the laboratory to the clinic. Research on military exposures assesses how both Gulf War deployment exposures and home side water contamination cause lasting effects on brain structure and function. VA New Jersey serves as a site for clinical trials and conducts fundamental animal research that will lead to new ways to attack cancer. Brain health research in the clinical and lab settings is largely focused on traumatic brain injury and neurodegenerative diseases.

VA Research Service investigators **Dr. Kevin Beck** and **Dr. Bruce Citron** are highlighted in this newsletter issue.

Lab Spotlight: Neurobehavioral Research Laboratory

Principal Investigator:
Kevin Beck, PhD



Dr. Beck's Neurobehavioral Research Lab studies focus on understanding behavior and brain dysfunction caused by **stress, trauma, and toxic insults**; combating **neurodegeneration**; and identifying sex differences in these processes.

Contact Information

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Lab Spotlight: Laboratory of Molecular Biology

Principal Investigator:
Bruce Citron, PhD



Dr. Citron's Molecular Biology Lab is concerned with the **brain and spinal cord**. His group continues to discover underlying mechanisms important to the health of neurons in the central nervous system. This research identifies targets for neuroprotective therapeutic strategies for those suffering **traumatic brain injury, Gulf War Illness, and other neurodegenerative conditions**.

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VBRI Partners with the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center

VBRI supports research at the VA New Jersey **War Related Illness and Injury Study Center** (WRIISC). WRIISC research focuses on improving the health of Veterans with post deployment health concerns.

WRIISC research interests cover a wide range of topics including environmental exposures and post deployment health, long-term health effects of combat, memory and mood difficulties, traumatic brain injuries, neurological diseases, integrative health and wellness approaches, disabilities resulting from deployment illnesses or injuries, women Veterans' health, and risk communication of deployment related concerns.

The work of WRIISC researchers **Dr. Michael Falvo** and **Dr. Lisa McAndrew** are highlighted in this newsletter issue.

Lab Spotlight: Cardiorespiratory Physiology Laboratory

Principal Investigator:
Michael Falvo, PhD



Dr. Falvo is Co-Director of the VA's **Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence** and Principal Investigator of the **Cardiorespiratory Physiology Laboratory** (CPL) at the VA New Jersey War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC). His clinical research laboratory focuses on understanding mechanisms of shortness of breath (dyspnea) and exercise intolerance in deployed Veterans within the contexts of **environmental and military exposures**.

Contact Information

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Lab Spotlight: Behavioral Health Research Laboratory

Principal Investigator:
Lisa McAndrew, PhD



Dr. McAndrew is the **Director of Research at the NJ War Related Illness and Injury Study Center** (WRIISC). The goal of her translational and patient-centered research is to improve the functioning of Veterans with **complex post-deployment conditions**. Her work has particularly focused on translating basic research into evidence-based treatments and care for **Gulf War Illness** and other health concerns from **military exposures**.

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Program Spotlight:

SCI/D, MS and ALS Clinical Research Program

Principal Investigator: Carol Gibson-Gill, MD



Dr. Gill's **Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders (SCI/D)**, **Multiple Sclerosis (MS)** and **Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)** Research Program's focus is looking at ways to promote seamless care for Veterans living with a SCI, MS and ALS, and exploring ways to improve **access to care** and **healthy caregiving** to improve overall health and quality of life for these Veterans. Areas of research interest also include preventing and addressing secondary conditions in Chronic SCI, and infection control and mitigating infectious diseases in the Veteran SCI, MS and ALS population.

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Lab Spotlight: Neurology Research Program

Principal Investigator:
Yun-Beom Choi, MD/PhD



The Lab of Dr. Choi is investigating a new drug candidate using animal models of **dementia** and **traumatic brain injury**. The lab's peptide has anti-inflammatory and immune system modulation properties and the research team hopes to develop a new drug to treat dementia, including **Alzheimer's disease** and brain dysfunction due to mild traumatic brain injury.

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Lab Spotlight: Hematology/Oncology Research Program

Principal Investigator:
Victor Chang, MD



The Hematology/Oncology Research Program conducts cutting edge clinical trials in **hematological malignancies** and **solid tumor cancers**. In addition to hematological diseases and cancers, Dr. Chang's research areas of interest include symptom control and palliative medicine.

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For more information about VBRI's research and education programs and to join our mailing list, please visit our contact page: <https://vbri.org/contact/>



Help us help Veterans!

Your donation will help us to continue our vital research and education as we strive to improve the health and well-being of our nation's Veterans.

To Donate visit <https://vbri.org/donate/>

For more information about research at the
VA New Jersey Health Care System
Email: vanjhcs.research@va.gov

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For more information about research at the
NJ War Related and Illness Injury Study Center
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