



Educational Keynote

Reimagining Veteran Health – the View from the VA

Friday, November 11 | 2:30 – 3:00 pm HST

Speaker

Carolyn Clancy, MD

Assistant Undersecretary for Health, Veterans
Administration

Today's Meeting

- VHA Response to COVID-19
- VHA Response to Long COVID
- Whole Health/Complementary & Integrative Medicine
- PACT Act Overview

Veterans Health Administration: Four Missions

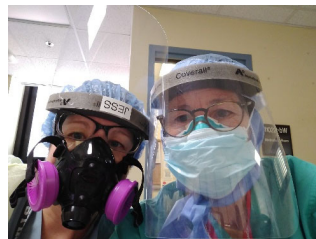
VHA Mission: To honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

VA's Four Statutory Missions:



Leveraging VA's Unique Assets in Responding to COVID-19

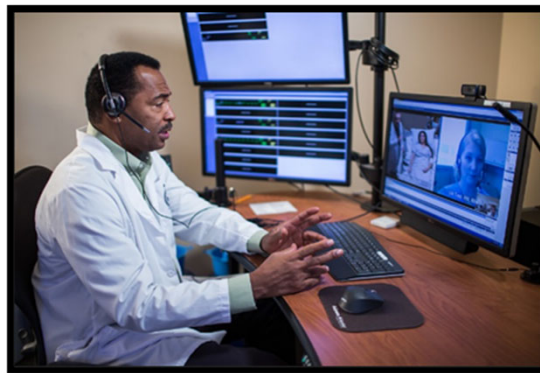
- Largest integrated health care system in the U.S.
- 75-year partnership with academic affiliates
- Embedded researchers who are also faculty members at the Nation's top universities
- Ability to rapidly self-fund multisite clinical studies to answer important, urgent clinical questions
- Service-oriented patient population who partner in their care, volunteer for research
- Early investment in telehealth
- State-of-the-art electronic health records
- Strong leadership support for Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) approach



Responding to COVID-19: Education and Training

- VHA continued to provide training during COVID-19, reaching nearly 118,000 health professions trainees in 2020 (compared with 124,000 in 2019)
- VHA changed supervision guidelines to allow trainees—with a supervisor connected remotely—to provide virtual care

**Trainees provided virtual care
to Veterans – *anywhere***



Responding to COVID-19: Education and Training

VHA SimLEARN partnered with the Employee Education System to create a public-facing website to provide free COVID-19-related training and resources, offered through VA and other authoritative external sources, without the need for staff to log in to the VA network or utilize a specific user account.

ICU
Wards
Emergency Department
Community Living Center
Mental Health
State Veterans Homes

Responding to COVID-19: The Power of Multisite Clinical Trials

VA's research program “...*has the most innovative clinical trials center in the world...*”

— (Then) Vice President Joe Biden upon conferring the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award to the VA Cooperative Studies Program Clinical Research Pharmacy Coordinating Center, 2009



Major National Research Initiatives

- **VA participated in two major national research initiatives** on COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics:
 1. Operation Warp Speed (OWS)
 2. Accelerating COVID-19 Therapeutic Interventions and Vaccines (ACTIV) initiative, a public-private partnership led by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- Through OWS and other efforts, VA has been an active participant in several clinical trials designed to evaluate potential COVID-19 vaccines:
 - ✓ Moderna/COVE trial (one VA site)
 - ✓ AstraZeneca trial
 - ✓ Janssen ENSEMBLE trial (17 VA sites)
 - ✓ Pfizer trial
 - ✓ Novavax trial

Responding to COVID-19: Innovation

VHA has an MOU with the Food and Drug Administration and National Institutes of Health 3D Print Exchange to share data and coordinate on open-source medical products for the COVID-19 response

VHA also works closely with *America Makes* to provide resources that will connect health care providers and 3D printing organizations

VHA facilities can submit a 3D printing need for consideration and tracking to the VHA Procurement & Logistics Office



Selected Research: NOSE Study

Nasal Swab Objective and Statistical Evaluation (NOSE) Study

VA Researchers are studying the safety and effectiveness of five types of 3D printed nasal swabs to be used to test for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases:

- Study aims to provide **scientific evidence of the value of 3D printed swabs** to the non-VA health care system, as part of VA's Fourth mission
- Goal is to **offset further potential shortages** of traditional swabs in the commercial supply chain
- In addition to COVID-19, viral targets include Flu A, Flu B and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)



Responding to COVID-19: Virtual Care

- VA has been providing telehealth nationally since 2003
- Between March 2020 and March 2022, telehealth capability accelerated exponentially, with a 1,701% increase in home or off-site virtual visits



Responding to COVID-19: Health Equity



In many ways, this year brought into even sharper and more painful focus the disturbing effects of racial biases and stereotypes on the quality of health and health care people of color endure.

- VA Secretary Denis McDonough

Health Equity: From HRO to HERO

Perspective

— AMERICAN COLLEGE OF —
MedicalQuality

OPEN

From HRO to HERO: Making Health Equity a Core System Capability

Ernest Moy, MD¹, Leslie R. M. Hausmann, PhD², and Carolyn M. Clancy, MD³

Abstract

As many health systems have been working to become high-reliability organizations (HROs), health equity has been largely absent from discussions and applications of HRO principles. This is a serious oversight. Disparities in health and health care represent systematic failures to achieve reliable outcomes for certain groups. Acceptance of disparities is antithetical to the essential HRO goal of “zero harm.” We propose adding Equity to HROs in the most literal sense by designating it as a key component and achieving High Equity Reliability Organizations. We describe how equity should be a crucial element of all 5 HRO core concepts: sensitivity to operations, preoccupation with failure, deference to expertise, resilience, and reluctance to simplify.

Keywords

disparities, equity, high reliability organization, patient safety, quality

Responding to COVID-19: Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy

- VA Listening Sessions with Veterans of Color (Late Summer/Early Fall 2020) revealed that to overcome vaccine hesitancy, information should:
 - Come from a trusted source, e.g., their physician or fellow Veteran
 - Address specific concerns, e.g., infamous Tuskegee study
 - Discuss current data on vaccine effectiveness
 - Be delivered via already used technology, i.e., mobile device
 - Link directly to a specific action, e.g., scheduling a vaccination appointment



Responding to Long COVID

By the Numbers...

- More than 788,000 unique patients that have tested positive COVID-19
- It is estimated that 4% to 7% of Veterans who have had COVID-19 will develop Long COVID



Long COVID: Sequela of Concern

***Nature* paper documenting multi-system effects of COVID
(Al-Aly et al., 2021)**

- Mortality risk: remains elevated for 6 months
- Mental health: depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, substance use disorders
 - Use of antidepressants, anxiety meds, and others
- Pain: higher risk of opioid use
- Cardiovascular system: acute coronary disease, heart failure, arrhythmias
- Nervous system and neurocognitive disorders
- Metabolic: new onset diabetes





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News Release

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Media Relations

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(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 6, 2022

Paxlovid reduces risk of Long COVID

WASHINGTON — Today, VA released a [study](#) showing the medication Paxlovid can reduce the risk of symptoms of “Long COVID,” which affects millions of people in the U.S. and around the world. In the interest of public health, the study, “[Nirmatrelvir and the risk of post-acute sequelae of COVID-19](#),” was released before peer-review on the pre-print server medRxiv.

The study, which included more than 56,000 Veterans with a positive SARS-CoV-2 test, showed that those given the oral antiviral medication in the first 5 days of a COVID-19 infection had a 25% decreased risk of developing 10 of 12 different Long COVID conditions studied — including heart disease, blood disorders, fatigue, liver disease, kidney disease, muscle pain, neurocognitive impairment and shortness of breath.

The decreased risk of long COVID associated with Paxlovid treatment exists regardless of whether it was a participant’s first infection or a reinfection and regardless of whether the participant was unvaccinated, vaccinated or boosted.

“Paxlovid reduces the risk of severe COVID-19 in the acute phase, and now, we have evidence that it can help reduce the risk of long COVID,” said **Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, chief of research and development at the VA St. Louis Health Care System, who led the study.** “This treatment could be an important asset to address the serious issue of long COVID.”

“This groundbreaking study is going to improve the lives of Veterans and all Americans,” said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough.** “VA’s researchers have conducted life-saving studies throughout the pandemic, and Dr. Al-Aly’s excellent work here is yet another example of VA leading the way.”

VA Research on Long COVID

- VA researchers have made significant contributions to the nation's understanding of Long COVID:
 - Establishing the broad array of clinical conditions associated with prior COVID infection including diabetes, neurologic and mental health, cardiovascular and renal. Assessing protective effect of vaccines.
- Established a COVID Outcomes Research Collaboratory to coordinate Long COVID research and conduct national study of outcomes using over 200,000 Veterans followed with EHR records
- Collaborating with DOD on study following 3000 patients from first diagnosis of COVID with regular blood tests and surveys to identify individual, genetic and immune factors affecting LC
- Establishing VA-wide Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN) to allow rapid dissemination and infusion of new knowledge into clinical practice

VA Response to Long COVID

- Finding of the Long COVID Environmental Scan and Interviews:
 - *“VHA needs to guide and support the way facilities approach Long COVID Care, given the complexity of care and evolving nature of the infection and illness, and assure that resources are available to all clinical facilities and VISNs.”*
- Community of Practice
 - More than 22 Long COVID Programs are treating Veterans; they are in varying stages of development, while VA establishes a national approach
 - Over 225 clinician members of the CoP across VA; Meets twice monthly to share strong practices and work collaboratively to problem-solve
- Integrated Project Team Purpose

Organize, support and report the progress in establishing clinical guidance and a system in which Long COVID care, support, and services are accessible to all Veterans across VA no matter where they live.

 - Be the integrator of the previously established Long COVID operational workgroup in order to develop an enterprise-wide Long COVID Learning Healthcare System

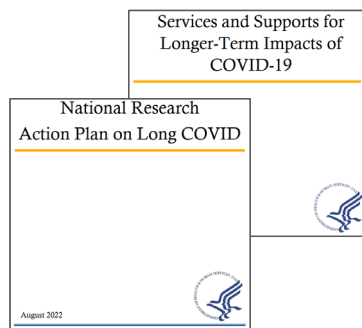
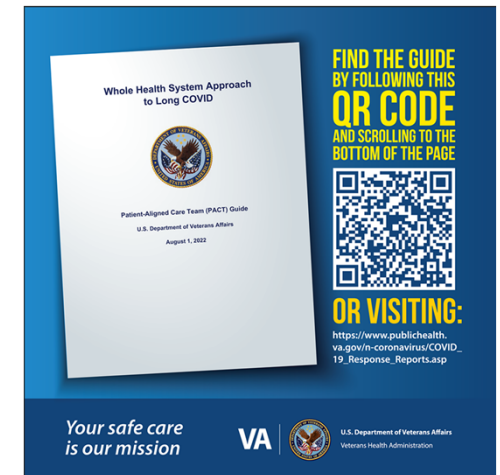
VA Long COVID Guide

August 1st – “Whole Health System Approach to Long COVID, Patient-Aligned Care Team (PACT) Guide”

- Information for health care providers to facilitate in defining, assessing, referring, managing, and treating typical Long COVID symptoms using a Whole Health approach

The guide includes:

- Hyperlinked directory of signs, symptoms, and other potential conditions
- Primer on the Whole Health System approach
- Section of one-page quick reference guides for navigating care based on a suspected diagnosis of Long COVID



August 3rd – Reports in Response to President Biden’s [Memorandum on Addressing the Long-Term Effects of COVID-19 | The White House](#)

- VA contributed to both reports
- Link to main page: <https://www.covid.gov/longcovid>

Whole Health as a Priority

Dr. Elnahal's Priorities

1. Hire faster and more competitively
2. Connect veterans to the soonest and best care
3. Serve veterans with toxic exposures
4. Accelerate the journey to high reliability
5. **Support Veterans' whole health, their caregivers, and survivors**
6. Prevent veteran suicide



Shereef Elnahal, MD
VHA Under Secretary for Health



“The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease.”

- Sir William Osler

Whole Health

- Whole Health begins with providers understanding what matters most to the patient and making care decisions in partnership
- VHA's transformation to a Whole Health System of Care incorporates complementary and integrative health alongside conventional care
- Mindfulness, movement and connection play a larger role in our well-being today than ever before



Whole Health Complementary & Integrative Medicine

- The whole health “toolkit” of acupuncture, biofeedback, meditation, mindfulness, tai-chi, yoga and more are transforming Veterans health, as well as the health of all Americans

Approaches for Treatment

- Acupuncture
- Biofeedback
- Clinical hypnosis
- Massage therapy

Approaches for Well-Being

- Meditation
- Guided imagery
- Tai chi / qigong
- Yoga

Whole Health Studies and Benefits

- QUERI promotes evidence-based policy through rigorous implementation and evaluation science has made tremendous strides in VA's transformation to a Whole Health System of care
 - Researchers at QUERI's Center for Evaluating Patient-Centered Care (EPCC) are focusing on strategies that empower and equip veterans in taking charge of their health and well-being
 - Complementary and Integrative Health Evaluation Center (CIHEC) researchers are assessing, and disseminating the evidence for CIH therapies to clinicians, researchers and stakeholders.
 - An increasing number of Veterans are taking full advantage of whole health services and the many positive associations to health and well-being that flow as result
 - Veterans with chronic pain who used whole health had a three-fold reduction in opioid use.
 - Veterans said their care was more patient-centered and that they felt more engaged in healthcare and self-care

Anecdotal Evidence and Veteran “Buy-In”

- Weekly yoga classes offered thru a partnership between the Manchester VAMC in Nashua, NH and the local YMCA are offering real benefits to Veterans
- Some veterans were skeptical at first, yet many found positive results with some choosing to attend multiple times a week
- Program’s success prompted expansion efforts
 - Additional offerings at Manchester VAMC such as coaching on fitness and mindfulness
 - Plans to reach other parts of the state

“It gave me greater insight into how to exercise my mind and body.”

After struggling with addiction for nearly three decades, “The pain relief literally save my life.”

The PACT Act of 2022

- *Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022*, known as the Honoring our PACT Act of 2022 or PACT Act
- Expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances
- Ensures veterans can receive high-quality health care screenings and services related to potential toxic exposures

*We can only see a short distance ahead,
but we can see plenty there that needs
to be done.*

- Alan Turing

