



Accolades and Achievements

Elizabeth “Lisa” Hannold, PhD Receives Funding from VA Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) for “*Factors Affecting Return to Work among OEF/OIF Veterans with Polytrauma*”



Elizabeth “Lisa” Hannold, PhD
Principal Investigator

RORC REAP Core Investigator Dr. Lisa Hannold recently received merit review funding for her Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Investigator Initiated Research (IIR) pilot project, “*Factors Affecting Return to Work among OEF/OIF Veterans with Polytrauma.*” Dr. Hannold will receive \$50,000 to study the barriers and facilitators to Independent Living (IL) as identified by community dwelling OEF/OIF veterans with polytrauma, their caregivers, and service providers. Perceptions of how these factors may affect veterans’ return to work will also be explored. For this project, Dr. Hannold will be collaborating with the Tampa VA Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center and the Veterans Benefits Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service. She hopes to use the findings from

this research to develop future proposals for longitudinal research and implementation projects to improve employability outcomes among veterans with polytrauma.

Project Abstract

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) identifies employment as a priority issue for OEF/OIF veterans. However, OEF/OIF veterans with polytrauma represent a new and unique VA sub-population. Polytraumatic injuries are more complex than injuries sustained in any previous conflict. Returning to work, therefore, may prove especially challenging. Among individuals with severe disabilities, employment outcomes are closely tied to the individual’s level of success with Independent Living (IL). IL refers to the ability to reside in the community and participate in activities of choice by managing available resources, negotiating barriers and exercising self-determination. IL often is viewed as a prerequisite to employment for severely disabled individuals, because barriers and facilitators to independence at home and in the community also influence success in the workplace. Thus, IL will be a critical first step to pursuing vocational/employment goals for OEF/OIF veterans with polytrauma. To date, no published studies have investigated IL among veterans with polytrauma. This pilot study will be the first project in a line of research to promote the independence and employability OEF/OIF veterans. The goals of the study are twofold. Goal 1 of the study is to investigate the barriers and facilitators to IL identified by community dwelling OEF/OIF veterans with polytrauma, caregivers, and service providers, and perceptions of how these factors may affect veterans’ return to work. This goal will be accomplished by using qualitative methods for data collection and analyses. Qualitative interviewing will be used to elicit the perspectives of veterans with polytrauma and caregivers living in Florida, and Florida-based Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment IL service providers. Qualitative data will be coded, and then analyzed using the constant comparative method. Goal #2 of the study is to evaluate the feasibility of using the data collection tools and procedures for a future planned study. An efficacy evaluation will be used to test and refine the data collection tools (interview guides and demographic checklists). To evaluate data collection procedures, field notes will be recorded and analyzed to identify optimal organizational procedures and time parameters to minimize subject burden. Findings will be used to plan and design a large, national study of factors affecting return to work among OEF/OIF veterans with polytrauma living throughout the United States.

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RORC REAP Helps “Welcome Home” Puerto Rican Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom

Members of the Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center Research Enhancement Award Program (RORC-REAP, Gainesville, FL) were invited to participate in the “Welcome Home!” (¡Bienvenidos a Casa!) event sponsored by the VA Caribbean Healthcare System and the San Juan VA Medical Center. The November 22nd celebration was held at the Pabellón de la Paz (Pavilion of Peace) in Luis Muñoz Marin Park in San Juan. VA Caribbean Health Care System Chief of Staff, Sandra C. Gracia, MD and Nancy Reissener, Interim Director, kicked off the day’s events with opening remarks thanking the veterans for their service and welcoming them home to Puerto Rico.

Organized by Luz Enid Del Valle, MSW, ACSW, OEF/OIF Program Manager and OEF/OIF Coordinators Office, the day was designed to show appreciation for the returning soldiers and their families, and to give them an opportunity to meet with VA and Veteran Service organizations. Several VA programs, including the Veterans Benefits Administration, VA Office of Seamless Transition, MyHealtheVet, VA Home Telehealth, and VA Spinal Cord Injury, were present to distribute information about their services. Veteran Service Organizations such as the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the Paralyzed Veterans Association (PVA), the American Legion, and the Silent Warrior program were on hand as well.



Left to right: From the VA Caribbean Health Care System Luz Enid Del Valle, MSW, ACSW, OEF/OIF Program Manager; Sandra Gracia-Lopez, MD, Chief of Staff; Evelyn Ramos, Acting Associate Director; Nancy Reissener, Interim Director; from the RORC REAP: Magaly Freytes, PhD, Investigator; Connie Uphold, PhD, ARNP, Principal Investigator; Kristen Wing, RORC-REAP Public Affairs Specialist



The team from the RORC-REAP was thrilled to participate in this “Welcome Home” as it provided them with the opportunity to disseminate close to 3,000 copies of a research product created especially for the Puerto Rican OEF/OIF veterans. Under the direction of Constance R. Uphold, PhD, ARNP, the investigative team worked with San Juan VAMC clinicians and patients, and local military support groups, to create a post-mobilization guidebook to assist veterans with their transition process back into civilian life. The “*Guía de Ayuda Para el Reajuste Post-Movilización de Veteranos/as Puertorriqueños Y Familiares*” (Post-deployment Readjustment Guide for Puerto Rican OEF/OIF Veterans and Families) was created to be

culturally relevant to the Puerto Rican veteran population and their needs. The guidebook was published in Puerto Rican Spanish and featured a design incorporating the Puerto Rican flag, and the national symbol, the “coquí” singing frog.

For Magaly Freytes, PhD, RORC-REAP Post-Doctoral Fellow, working on this project gave her a chance to apply her Counselor Education training, as well as her perspective as a native Puerto Rican. Dr. Freytes’ personal connection to this U.S. Commonwealth was integral to the success of the project, particularly during the focus group interviews conducted in Puerto Rican Spanish. “The veterans really appreciated that I could speak to them in their own language. It made them feel comfortable and they were able to communicate more openly,” said Dr. Freytes.

The guidebook, which was developed with the support of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) Foundation, and VA Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI), was very well received. According to Dr. Freytes, “The VA Caribbean Health Care System providers who received the guide were excited to have a document developed specifically for them and their veterans. They said this was the first OEF/OIF-related material just for the Puerto Rican veterans and their families. The language and images clearly spoke to this population. They loved the photos, the colors, and the inclusion of the beloved coquí. They were grateful for our efforts and couldn’t stop thanking us and expressing their admiration for the guide.”

Due to the overwhelming response and demand for this publication, an additional 3,000 guidebooks will be printed and ready for dissemination in early 2009.



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