

# Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center

VA HSR&D/RR&D Research Enhancement Award Program



## RORC MISSION

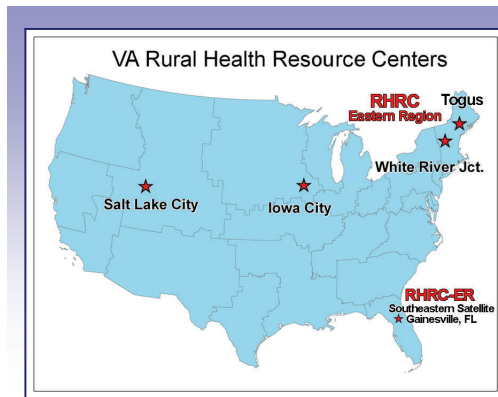
The mission of the Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center (RORC) Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) is to conduct interdisciplinary research to improve the health, function, and community reintegration of post-deployed veterans and veterans with neurological impairments.

## RORC REAP Targets Rural Health Issues

The Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center Research Enhancement Award Program (RORC REAP) at the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System (NF/SGVHS) has been selected as the Southeastern Site for one of three Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Rural Health Resource Centers. As a satellite of the Veterans Rural Health Resource Center, Eastern Region (VRHRC-ER) in Togus, Maine/White River Junction, Vermont, the multi-disciplinary team of local investigators from the RORC will work to

serve the largest number of rural veterans in our region, so this is a great opportunity to better understand the health issues of our veterans living in remote areas.” The primary areas of interest

include Remaining Sight (VICTORS) program, which provides low vision rehabilitation to help veterans maximize their functional vision and increase their independence; and the Comprehensive Care Clinic for Veterans with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). The MS Clinic in Lake City is evaluating exercise for veterans with MS utilizing video transmission to rural sites and home tele-health monitoring and prevention of skin breakdown and pressure ulcers.



The centers will serve as satellite offices for VA's Office of Rural Health. The eastern center will be located in Vermont at the White River Junction VA Medical Center, the central region at the Iowa City VA Medical Center and the western region at the Salt Lake City VA Medical Center.

develop and implement innovations, such as tele-health technology and mobile clinics, to improve the accessibility and quality of healthcare to veterans throughout rural America.

that will be studied in Gainesville and Lake City are access to and delivery of comprehensive care to disabled patients in rural areas, and rehabilitation of motor, cognitive, and visual disabilities.

Paul M. Hoffman, MD, Southeastern Site Leader and RORC Principal Investigator stated that “The Gainesville and Lake City VA Medical

Centers serve the largest number of rural veterans in our region, so this is a great opportunity to better understand the health issues of our veterans living in remote areas.” Some current rural health initiatives already underway at the Lake City VA Medical Center, include the Visual Impairment Center to Opti-

imize Remaining Sight (VICTORS) program, which provides low vision rehabilitation to help veterans maximize their functional vision and increase their independence; and the Comprehensive Care Clinic for Veterans with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). The MS Clinic in Lake City is evaluating exercise for veterans with MS utilizing video transmission to rural sites and home tele-health monitoring and prevention of skin breakdown and pressure ulcers. Future clinical demonstration projects to be conducted in the NF/SGVHS will evaluate the video transmission of specialty care and rehabilitation training for caregivers of veterans in rural areas. RORC investigators will analyze the cost-effectiveness and quality of care of these programs, as well as patient satisfaction, and will make recommendations about how these services can be provided for veterans in rural areas across the United States and Puerto Rico.

### Inside this issue:

- Welcoming Home the Puerto Rican Veterans 2
- RORC REAP Recently Funded Research 3
- RORC REAP Associate Director Featured in VA Research Currents 3
- Accolades and Achievements 4

## Welcoming Home the Puerto Rican Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom



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.

SAN JUAN, PR. 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 Marín 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 the 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 Department of Veterans Affairs and Veteran Service organizations.

Several VA programs, including the Veterans Benefits Administration, VA Office of Seamless Transition, MyHealthVet, 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 of America (PVA), the American Legion, and the Silent Warrior program were on hand as well.

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 “coqui” 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.

*Continued on Page 4*

## RORC REAP Recently Funded Research


### **Factors Affecting Return to Work among OEF/OIF Veterans with Polytrauma**

Elizabeth M. Hannold, PhD, Principal Investigator


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 commu-

nity 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. Findings also will be used to develop future proposals to fund longitudinal research and implementation projects to improve employability outcomes among veterans with polytrauma. 

### **RORC REAP Associate Director (Co-PI) Diane Cowper Ripley, PhD Featured in VA Research Currents**

Diane Cowper Ripley, PhD was featured in the VA Research and Development publication *Research Currents* in an article titled “**Putting Polytrauma Care ‘On the Map.’**” Dr. Cowper Ripley and her team's work in Geographic Information Systems was highlighted along with results from their research that tracked access to VA care for traumatically wounded veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. The findings from their work will help VA planners decide where to locate services for current and future cohorts of veterans. 

To read the full VA *Research Currents* article, please visit: <http://www.research.va.gov/news/features/polytrauma.cfm>.

To view some of [Dr. Cowper Ripley's](#) other work utilizing Geographic Information Systems, please see the VA Health Care Atlas at [http://www.va.gov/rorc/health\\_care\\_atlas.cfm](http://www.va.gov/rorc/health_care_atlas.cfm)



**“Welcome Home”**

*continued from Page 2*

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



## Accolades and Achievements



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**RORC REAP Core Investigator, Constance R. Uphold, PhD, ARNP, was awarded the 2008 Outstanding Researcher Award from the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties.** The National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF) is the only organization specifically devoted to promoting quality nurse practitioner (NP) education at the national and international levels.

**Member of the RORC REAP Methodology Core, Linda Young, PhD, received the Founders Award from the American Statistical Association** for her service and extraordinary leadership as vice president and as chair of the Council of Sections, Chair of the Section on Statistics Education, and Chair of the Section on Statistics and the Environment.

**RORC REAP Affiliate Investigator Joyce K. Stechmiller, PhD, ARNP was recently named a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing (FAAN).** The academy awards fellowships to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to effective nursing through practice, research, creative development, scholarly work, the influence of public policy or a combination of these.

**Director of Biostatistics Core for the RORC REAP, Sam Wu, PhD, was promoted to Associate Professor** in the University of Florida College of Medicine, Department of Epidemiology and Health Policy Research.

**Congratulations to the following RORC REAP staff who presented at the VA QUERI National Meeting in Phoenix, AZ, December 10-12, 2008.**

**Constance R. Uphold, PhD, ARNP**

- Community Reintegration and Puerto Rican OEF/OIF Veterans and Families
- Direct-to-Consumer Approach to Improve Outcomes in Atrial Fibrillation

**Diane Cowper Ripley, PhD**

- Location of and Potential Gaps in Rehabilitation Services for OEF/OIF Veterans: FY03-FY06
- Panel Discussion: “VIREC Introduces New Data for VA Research”

**Bruce Vogel, PhD**

Why is Acute Rehabilitation for VA Stroke Patients Less Costly than Subacute Rehabilitation?

**Huanguang “Charlie” Jia, PhD**

Geographic Variation in Poststroke Depression among VA Stroke Patients