




**VETERANS
HEALTH
FOUNDATION**

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**2023
ANNUAL
REPORT**

Message from the CEO, Alanna Caffas

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Thank you, Ret. Major Alan Smith!



Al's distinguished career and service has been defined by his work and commitment to Veterans. Following his two decades of service to the United States Air Force, Al continued

to advocate for Veterans and their families through his role as a congressional liaison for former Congressman Mike Doyle. Al was appointed to the Veterans Health Foundation as a Board Director in 1998 and has served the organization with great pride and passion for our mission.

Thank you, Dr. Patrick Doyle!



Prior to his retirement from VA Pittsburgh, Dr. Patrick Doyle served as the Associate Director for Research within the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical

Center where his research program focused on the rehabilitation of language processing disorders following brain injury. During his tenure, he was installed as a Fellow of the American Speech Language and Hearing Association and received the Honors of the Association of VA Speech Language Pathologists. He also served as Visiting Scientist of the World Health Organization (WHO) where he collaborated on the WHO Disability Assessment Schedule (WHODAS II) multi-country field trial. Dr. Doyle developed the Burden of Stroke Scale (BOSS), the Aphasia Communication Outcome Measure (ACOM), and is the Founding Director of VHF's Program for Intensive Residential Aphasia Treatment & Education (PIRATE), which continues to serve as a unique nationwide resource within VHA for the rehabilitation of brain-injured Veterans with speech and language disorders and as a center for aphasia intervention and outcomes research. Following retirement, Dr. Doyle continues to advocate for and support VHF along with other Veteran focused organizations including Project Hero's Honor Ride. Thank you for your years of service and dedication to VHF!

Dear Valued Stakeholders,

It is truly my honor to share with you VHF's inaugural Annual Report, highlighting the significant impact, growth, and achievements we have celebrated over this past year. Our scientific and scholarly leaders continue to exude passion and directly contribute to the advancement of Veteran health.



With a steadfast commitment to supporting Veterans by advancing VA research and education, VHF joined the small community of VA-affiliated Non-Profit Corporations (NPC) across the country who serve multiple VA Medical Centers (VAMC). In addition to Pittsburgh, our resources now support research and education programs in Wilkes-Barre, PA and Wilmington, Delaware, with more to come!

Our expansion will allow us to reach into communities across the Commonwealth, collectively leveraging our interdisciplinary and cohesive clinical trials infrastructure to provide Veterans with more access and opportunity to cutting edge treatments and therapies.

Our research and educational projects are dedicated to the "long game," with diversified programs that create impact across society. A successful research program doesn't end with scientific results in a lab or a publication, but has cascading effects that result in economic, health, and community benefits over many years to come. This is the core of VA research in service to society—a role we take seriously.

Despite the lingering effects of the pandemic, 2023 turned out to be an outstanding year of advancements and solid financial performance.

Our record-breaking total research expenditures (\$2,697,794) are just one indicator of how our work drives progress. The discoveries, knowledge generation, application, and implementation engendered by our research fuel optimism about the fate of humankind.

Our administrative infrastructure continues to grow, offering vital resources for VA researchers and Veterans. It has indeed been an outstanding year for VA Research! I thank and congratulate all the VA scientists who have contributed to these successes.

I would also like to thank our staff, executive leadership team and Board of Directors for their contributions in FY23. I am grateful for the agility and commitment our staff has shown over the past several years as we have managed the many formidable challenges of the pandemic and its impact on research and operations.

I am proud to represent VHF, and I look forward to 2024 and the positive impacts we will make in many areas, locally, regionally and around the world!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alanna Caffas".

Alanna Caffas

A YEAR IN REVIEW: 2023 SNAPSHOT

90 PROJECTS
MANAGED

27 PROPOSALS
SUBMITTED

5 PROPOSALS
FUNDED

26 EMPLOYEES

90 INVESTIGATORS
SUPPORTED

3 VAMC's
SUPPORTED

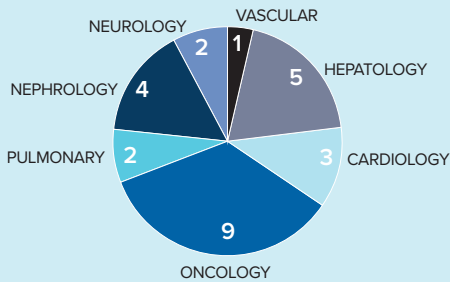
\$2.97 MILLION
TOTAL REVENUE

\$5 MILLION
MANAGED ASSETS

\$2.6 Mil **\$54,141**
Research Education

CLINICAL TRIALS

VHF administered **26 industry-sponsored clinical trials** in research areas including:



NEW VHF PARTNERSHIPS

This year, VHF completed its first strategic planning retreat as a VA Multi Non-Profit Corporation (NPC), placing a renewed focus on fostering and strengthening relationships with our stakeholders. As one of only 13 VA affiliated NPCs to support multiple VA Medical Centers nationwide, we are proud of our efforts to expand patient-focused, decentralized clinical research to enhance the diversity and inclusion of Veterans participating in research.

Since our approval to serve as a multi-site NPC in 2020, VHF has affiliated with the VA Medical Centers in Wilkes-Barre and Butler, PA along with Wilmington, DE.



INTRAMURAL AWARDS



Gerald Goldstein Ph.D. Award

Named after renowned neuropsychologist and Senior Research Career Scientist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, Dr. Gerald Goldstein was best known for his seminal research contributions to the neuropsychology of alcoholism and schizophrenia as well as neuropsychological rehabilitation. Following Dr. Goldstein's death in 2017, VHF created the Gerald Goldstein Early Career Mental Health Research Award to promote research that contributes to the early career development of psychologists and psychiatrists seeking to advance the care of patients with mental illness. This year's recipient of the Gerald Goldstein Early Career Mental Health Research Award is:

MARK THOMAS, PhD, VA Pittsburgh

Project Title: Does engagement in CBT for Insomnia Improve Multidimensional Sleep Health in Veterans with and without Obstructive Sleep Apnea?

Medical Education and Patient Safety (MEPS) Awards

The VHF-funded Medical Education and Patient Safety (MEPS) grants were established in 2014 to provide support for VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) staff and trainees conducting new, groundbreaking research in medical education and/or patient safety. The goal of these grants is to support the scholarly work of VA staff and trainees in medical education and patient safety and to encourage staff and trainees to pursue further innovative ideas based on their projects. In 2023, the MEPS program was expanded to include Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center (WBVAMC) and Wilmington VA Medical Center (WVAMC). This year's MEPS award recipients are:

JENNIFER DRESS, PharmD VA Wilkes Barre

Project Title: Long-Acting Injectable Antipsychotic Utilization Improvement through Pharmacist Comprehensive Medication Management Clinic

RACHEL WOJCIK, MD VA Pittsburgh

Project Title: High Fidelity Simulation of Endobronchial Blocker Placement

JORGE CANDIOTTI, PhD and CHANG DAE LEE, PhD, VA Pittsburgh

Project Title: Improving wheelchair service provision and disability awareness through an educational board game: Development and Evaluation

OTHER ACTIVITIES

VHF Celebrates 2023 National VA Research Week

In support and celebration of National VA Research Week, VHF's Board of Directors and Dr. Walid Gellad, Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development, invited the submission of abstracts for poster or oral presentations from early career investigators, clinical research and post-doctoral fellows, medical residents, and graduate students engaged in research at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) as part of our Early Career Investigator Award. Congratulations to our 2023 winners!

Overall Abstract Winners

MIAO WANG, PhD (BLR&D), *Project Title:* Inhibition of Galectin 3 in infiltrating macrophages alleviates brain lesion early after ischemic stroke

ADAM STERCZALA, PhD (RR&D), *Project Title:* Circulating irisin is positively correlated with tibial volumetric bone mineral density in men

Poster Contest Winners

JENNIFER MAK, BS (BLR&D), *Project Title:* Non-Primary Motor Area Involvement in Reaching Behavior After Stroke

CHARLES BENNETT, PhD (CSR&D), *Project Title:* Evaluation of a Novel Telehealth Methodology for Daily Monitoring of Suicidality: A Pilot Study

TAYLOR TORRES, BS (CSR&D), *Project Title:* Impact of Episodic Future Thinking on Delay Discounting in Cocaine Users with and without a History of Incarceration

HAILEE KULICH, PhD (RR&D), *Project Title:* Reliability and Validity of the Caregiver Assisted Transfer Technique Instrument (CATT)



Our CEO Graduated from Leadership Pittsburgh!

Congratulations to our CEO, Alanna Caffas, for graduating from Leadership Pittsburgh—a highly selective nine-month program for established senior-level leaders in the Pittsburgh region. As a Leadership Pittsburgh participant, Alanna attended monthly sessions led by content area experts and community leaders with a focus on obtaining the exposure, experiences, and connections to continue growing and thriving as a senior-level leader in our community.



VHF Honored with NAVREF Awards

Congratulations to our amazing teams at VHF who were honored with two awards at the 2023 NAVREF Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Jennifer Mock, our Finance & Operations Manager, accepted the Innovation and Best Practice Award and Dr. Walid Gellad, Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development, accepted an award recognizing our team's outstanding efforts to exceed requirements for the VA Innovation and Research Review System on behalf of VA Pittsburgh's research office.



The Program for Intensive Residential Aphasia Treatment & Education (PIRATE)

VA Pittsburgh's Program for Intensive Residential Aphasia Treatment & Education (PIRATE) provides treatment to Veterans and active-duty service members with aphasia, a language disorder that impacts the ability to understand language, speak, read, and write. Often caused by stroke or head injury, aphasia affects more than 2.4 million Americans.

In 2012, the Association of Veterans Affairs Speech-Language Pathologists gave an Outstanding Achievement award to the PIRATE Clinical Team in recognition of the team's "expertise and commitment in contributing to the quality of care that VA Speech-Language Pathologists give to our nation's Veterans."

PIRATE BY THE NUMBERS

- Since its founding in 2009, PIRATE has **served 246 individuals with aphasia**.
- **28 individuals treated were active-duty personnel** at the time of their participation.
- PIRATE has received **560 referrals from 47 states and 20 VISNs**.
- Since 2020, funds donated to PIRATE helped **defray travel costs for 18 Veterans** for whom participation would otherwise have been financially difficult or impossible.
- Since May of 2020, PIRATE has offered **9 virtual sessions to 23 Veterans with aphasia** for whom travel to Pittsburgh was not possible, either due to the COVID-19 pandemic or for other reasons.

In addition to providing world-class, evidence-based aphasia rehabilitation care, PIRATE also serves as a valuable clinical training resource and has a mutually beneficial relationship with the VA Pittsburgh Aphasia Research Lab. Currently, VHF is administering two National Institute of Health (NIH) and National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) randomized trials examining aphasia treatment in the context of an intensive schedule modeled on PIRATE (R01DC017475) and as well as improving the efficiency of clinical tools for assessing word production in aphasia (R01DC018813).

"My husband was in a virtual version of PIRATE and participated as though he was in the same room. I watched his speech skills grow. I saw his smile and laughter return. The compassionate, knowledgeable therapists encouraged and challenged him. Perhaps most important, I saw him begin to participate in life again."

"This is the only opportunity to get intensive therapy for aphasia in the VA community. These folks know aphasia backward and forward. Now I have the tools to move forward and get better even after nine years. It's awesome."