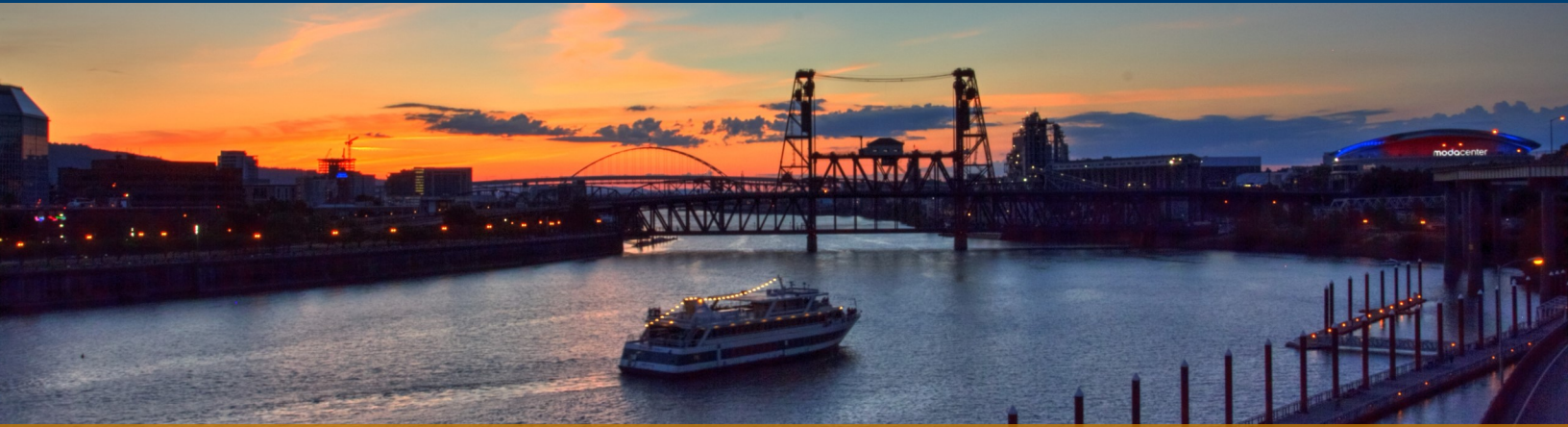




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CIVIC Newsletter



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In This Issue...

Community Websites Can Be a Great Resource for Veteran Suicide Prevent but Are They Always Helpful?.....2

More Than Just Data: Engaging Research Participants Yields Trust in the Research Community.....3

Orders for Limiting Treatment: Are Patient Preferences Considered in the Emergency Department?.....5

When Infection Control Policies Don't Protect You: The Role of Environment in Long Term Care Facilities.....4

Veteran Engagement Highlight.....6

Media Mentions & Accolades.....7

CIVIC Announcements.....8



Community Websites Can Be a Great Resource for Veteran Suicide Prevention but Are They Always Helpful?

by Anders Herreid-O'Neill, MA

As health information is easily accessed online, yet diffused across a network of independent websites, blogs, and articles, the question of what information exists and how it is presented becomes of paramount concern. This question becomes all the more important in the context of the crisis of suicide among Veterans. **Dr. Jason Chen** and team tackled this question by analyzing a series of websites aimed toward informing Veterans about suicide. They examined the adherence to safe messaging standards, community integration, language accessibility, credibility, and usability of each website.

Across Google, Bing, and Yahoo they found nine websites hosted by organizations which were community-based, not healthcare organizations, and which contained content for Veterans with a focus on suicide prevention. All the websites surveyed hosted information for Veterans seeking help (e.g., a crisis line), and many contained awareness information (such as prevention-oriented activities, like walks and fundraisers.) Most of the websites were scored well by the team regarding usability. However, the level of readability was much higher than suggested, and a few even included referrals to unsubstantiated treatments.

Surprisingly, none of the sites contained information on lethal means safety. Though this can be an uncomfortable subject, especially when it concerns firearms, it has been shown to be an important factor in lowering suicide risk. Community organizations may be an especially effective vehicle for this information given their



"I truly believe the websites we reviewed all had good intentions in their messaging"

- Dr. Jason Chen

understanding of Veteran culture.

The team determined that collaboration between clinicians and community groups would be crucial to increasing the safety and effectiveness of these websites, "I truly believe the websites we reviewed all had good intentions in their messaging but did not know about potential negative effects such as triggering at-risk Veterans with graphic images," said Dr. Chen. With new knowledge about the access to, and reliability of, suicide awareness websites Dr. Chen believes the next step is to identify the mechanism between unsafe suicide messaging and the spread of suicide through at risk communities since, "knowing more about these mechanisms may help us identify ways to decrease these effects."

[Click here to read the full article!](#)

More Than Just Data: Engaging Research Participants Yields Trust in the Research Community

by Jacob Dougherty, BA



The interaction between researchers and study participants is traditionally an observer-observee dynamic.. Participants are uninvolved in the research design, oversight, or dissemination. While the norm, participants can feel as though they are not fully immersed in a project meant to benefit them. CIVIC Core Investigator, **Dr. Sarah Ono**, and her collaborator Dr. Gala True, detail their process of using community-engaged research and its unmeasured effects throughout a photonarrative project illustrating the experiences of post-9/11 Veterans with traumatic brain injuries. One such outcome is evident in the author list, as two Veterans and two caregivers of Veterans are authors.

"One Veteran author, Lawrence, felt that Dr. True was supporting him and developing a foundation for trust"

The paper outlines both the methods used to involve Veterans and caregivers in their project as well as the effects on the researcher-participant relationship. By using ethnographic

observations, for instance, one Veteran author, Lawrence, felt that Dr. True was supporting him and developing a foundation for trust between the two.

When another Veteran, Ray, joined the study team, caregiver author – Sharon – and her Veteran husband felt less apprehensive about participation. Furthermore, the investigators gave ownership of data to the participants, soliciting them to choose which data could be publicly disseminated; and responding when requests to remove public data were made. This was done to respect the Veterans as more than just data sources, but as equally valuable members of the research community. Finally, the Veterans were invited to disseminate the research.

Dr. Ono and her colleagues used this paper to demonstrate the feasibility and values of community-engaged research. With community-engaged research, they developed not only partnerships, but friendships, with those they intended to serve through research.

[Click here to read the full article!](#)

Orders for Limiting Treatment: Are Patient Preferences Considered in the Emergency Department?

by Beau Edwards, BS

For adults who suffer from serious illnesses and who are nearing the end of their lives increasing the quality of their life rather than the length may be a priority. In most states, these patients can dictate their preferences for the intensity of medical treatment and the forms of life sustaining measures through the Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) program. This program allows patients to turn their treatment preferences into medical orders that are easily accessed by any clinician at the time of care through electronic medical records ensuring that their wants are honored in all cases.

A recent study by CIVIC's **Dr. Kelly Vranas** and colleagues sought to understand how preferences as stated through POLST forms might influence the aggressiveness of treatment in patients in the emergency department. Of the patients who had POLST forms, most had official orders for full medical treatment, meaning they wanted any treatment that would prolong their life. However, many of these patients did not

"The large proportion of patients presenting to the [Emergency Department] with full treatment orders...may also diminish [the] potential effectiveness" of POLST
- Dr. Kelly Vranas

have their orders accessed by a clinician before hospital admission.

Dr. Vranas commented that, despite not having their forms read, patients with treatment-limiting orders had shorter hospital stays and less aggressive treatments. Even so, Dr. Vranas stated "It is very important to ensure that emergency physicians are aware of the content of [these] forms in real-time in order to provide treatment in line with patients' goals of care."

The researchers advocate for more education and counseling on disease trajectories so patients can better understand their treatment options and decide what is best for them. This includes training physicians to discuss options with their patients on an ongoing basis.

[Click here to read the full article!](#)



When Infection Control Policies Don't Protect You: The Role of Environment in Long-Term Care Facilities

by Rachel Matsumoto, MS

In long-term care facilities, practicing hand hygiene and donning protective equipment such as gowns and gloves when caring for patients in their rooms are widely considered the best defenses against antibiotic resistant infections. But is implementing protective measures only at the time of direct patient care and with little regard for shared spaces in the facility enough to prevent the spread of healthcare-associated infections? Perhaps not.

Interested in learning more about person-to-person contact in common areas of long-term

Do infection control practices matter even when interacting with patients in shared areas of long term care facilities?

care facilities operated by the VA, a team of investigators including CIVIC's **Drs. Chris Pfeiffer** and **Graeme Forrest**, spent more than a year observing patient and staff interactions. In particular, the team tracked the number of staff-to-staff, staff-to-patient, patient-to-patient, and person-to-environment interactions in areas including the dining hall, lounge, and physical and occupational therapy rooms. In all, the research team recorded more than 1,700 interactions over 531 observation hours. They found that patient-to-patient interactions occurred least often. While on the other hand, staff-to-patient as well as staff to environment interactions were most common.

As the call to investigate the role the environment plays in spreading infectious diseases becomes louder, the current study begins to shed light on the gap in infection control policies. Staff have frequent contact with patients outside of patient rooms—where protective measures are not in place. The authors call for enhancements to environmental cleansing to bolster infection control practices and to protect both patients and staff from healthcare-related infections.

[Click here to read the full article!](#)



Veteran Engagement Group Member Spotlight: *Cassandra*

CIVIC's **Veteran Engagement Group (VEG)** is comprised of Veterans from various service eras, branches, and backgrounds who regularly come together to meet with investigators. VEG members provide individualized feedback to CIVIC investigators on a diverse range of topics and at all stages of the research process. Incorporating VEG members' perspectives, especially as users of the VA healthcare system, bolsters translation to practice and helps CIVIC research to be more patient-centered.

Cassandra Krawec-Paul is an Army Veteran who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and is a founding member of VEG. Cassandra joined VEG for the same reasons she joined the Army, "to give to others and to be a part of something bigger than myself" and she continues to be a member of the group because her drive to remain connected to the Veteran community, to be helpful and to give back is strong. Through VEG, Cassandra has learned how dedicated others are to caring for Veterans, "the researchers care about doing good for the Veteran community [by making sure they] get care and programs to enrich their lives." In addition to that, she has learned a lot about the inner workings of health services research, "there are a lot of behind-the-scenes actions that no one really understands...It is a lot of detailed work and I am glad that the research department puts in so much time and effort to help Veterans."

Fun Fact: Cassandra loves singing karaoke. "I started my singing career while in the Army bonding with my fellow soldiers."



Outside of her dedication to VEG, Cassandra remains connected to the Veteran community through Veteran organizations such as DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars). She also connects with Veterans through Facebook and through volunteering at her son's school, with sports, and with the Boy Scouts. She says she loves to help other Veterans by sharing information, "when I was in the Army, I was always helping my soldiers to get them information and tools to better themselves." Cassandra has carried these habits forward and is always helping Veterans in her community, "I did help an Air Force Veteran get a service dog through the program I received my service dog."

[Click here to visit the VEG Website!](#)

Media Mentions & Accolades

CIVIC investigator **Dr. Jennifer Barton** has accepted the position of Rheumatology Section Chief at VA Portland Health Care System. Congratulations, Dr. Barton!

Congratulations are in order for CIVIC's **Dr. Jason Chen** who was appointed the Assistant Director of the OHSU Clinical Psychology PhD Program! Join CIVIC in wishing Dr. Chen well with this new position!

Congratulations to **Drs. Denise Hynes, Lisa Silbert, and Alan Teo** who will receive funding from the first round of VA HSR&D COVID-19 special funding.

Dr. Alan Teo's work on hikikomori was featured by Oregon Public Broadcasting. You can listen to the OPB Think Out Loud special [here](#) or read more about it on OPB's website [here](#).

Dr. Jason Chen's Career Development Award was highlighted by VA HSR&D as part of their [quarterly research highlights](#).

Dr. Jason Chen and CIVIC Research Associate, **Kyla Tompkins** were invited to do a podcast with the Rocky Mountain MIRECC as members of a burnout prevention panel. You can listen to the podcast [here](#).

Former CIVIC fellow and current investigator, **Dr. Jessica Wyse**, co-authored the book *On the Outside: Prisoner Reentry and Reintegration* which was selected by the Vera Institute for Justice for the [2019 Best of Justice Reform List](#).

CIVIC's work was referenced in [Mind Body Green's](#) article, "How a 'Moai' Could Combat Loneliness & Help People Live Longer." The article includes work from **Dr. Jason Chen, Dr. Alan Teo, Dr. Steve Dobscha, Dr. Meike Niederhausen, Heather Marsh**, and [Mind Body Green](#).

Work by **Dr. Jason Chen** and team on social connection and suicide prevention for Veterans was featured in the VA Blog *VAntage Point*. You can read more about this work [here](#).



CIVIC Announcements

COVID your cough!: You can play an active role in outbreak prevention by always practicing **good hygiene**, and staying home if you're sick!

Follow us on Twitter **@PortlandCIVIC** to keep up to date on CIVIC happenings during the stay at home order.

CIVIC's **Veteran Engagement Group** is still meeting during these times of remote work. If you are interested in presenting during one of our upcoming virtual meetings, contact the VEG Liaison, Rachel Matsumoto (Rachel.Matsumoto@va.gov).

Dr. Richard Stone reminded VA Healthcare providers that the Department of Veterans Affairs is the legally designated backup to an overstressed national healthcare system and could handle overflow COVID patients ([NY Times article here](#)).

Missing your CIVIC coworkers? Keep an eye out for an email from the CIVIC admin team for another **virtual social hour**. If you have any ideas for events (another trivia hour, karaoke, live action Dance Dance Revolution) email them to Chris Larsen (Chris.Larsen1@va.gov).

Masks on! Remember to **always wear your mask** in public areas and when you are within six feet of another person at VA Portland Health Care System. This applies even if you are not engaged in patient-facing activities and when you are in Building 6. You can find information on how to make, wear, and care for a cloth face covering on the [CDC website](#).

If you're missing the soup from CIVIC's **Soup Club** or the cake from **Cake Club**, fret no more! Reminisce on the old times with us by making [this soup recipe](#) or this [cake recipe](#). Delicious!

CIVIC's **Veteran Engagement Group** is recruiting! If you or a Veteran you know are interested in participating, contact the VEG Liaison, Rachel Matsumoto (Rachel.Matsumoto@va.gov).

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