

The Department of Veterans Affairs Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers

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For more than a decade, the 6 Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers have connected with 52 dedicated movement disorder clinics at various VA facilities. This collaborative relationship has produced a comprehensive approach to medical care; site-based research; and high-quality educational opportunities for patients, caregivers, health care providers, and clinical trainees.



Federal Practitioner's 30th anniversary celebration continues with the spotlight this month on the accomplishments of the Department of Veterans Affairs Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers.

In 2001, the VHA created a national system of comprehensive care centers to serve veteran patients with Parkinson's disease (PD) and other movement disorders. Veterans anywhere in the country could be referred to these 6 Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers (PADRECCs), which brought together expert multidisciplinary teams to provide a full spectrum of treatment options from pharmacologic therapies to chemodenervation (neurotoxin) treatment to neuromodulation using deep brain stimulation (DBS) devices. The PADRECCs partnered with clini-

cians across the VHA system to create the VA PD Consortium Network to broaden the availability of comprehensive PD care. Over the past 12 years, the PADRECCs have individually and collaboratively developed innovative programs focused on clinical care, research, and education.

CLINICAL CARE

The PADRECC sites have developed a standardized approach for comprehensive patient evaluation and management. For example, PADRECC-wide evaluation of newly released medications leads to consistent availability of these treatments across the VHA. Collaboration in the VA Cooperative Study on Deep Brain Stimulation with the Cooperative Study Project 468 (CSP#468) brought standardized protocols for evaluating patients for this treatment and a consistent approach to clinical management. More recently, PADRECC-wide procedures for the delivery of telemedicine consultations have been created. Patients now have access to the full complement

of modern treatments, innovative investigational therapies, and care delivered by multidisciplinary teams to address medical and psychosocial needs. The National VA Parkinson's Disease Consortium Network links the 6 PADRECCs to dozens of regional VA specialty clinics in a hub-and-spoke model of care, ensuring even easier access of specialty care to veterans.

RESEARCH

The PADRECC-wide collaboration on CSP#468, the landmark DBS study co-sponsored by the VA Cooperative Studies Program and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, resulted in seminal papers published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Neurology*. The PADRECCs have developed a comprehensive research program focusing on all aspects of PD. Their clinical research portfolio includes neurosurgical research, research in motor and nonmotor symptoms of PD, the

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use of imaging in PD, developing biomarkers for PD, health services research, pharmacologic therapy, alternative therapies, and studying caregiver burden. Their basic science research focuses on the causes of PD. This research includes examining neuropathological changes in the brain of deceased patients, mechanisms of pesticide toxicity and gene-environment interactions, testing new drugs in a zebrafish model, and studying molecular mechanisms underlying selective neuronal degeneration.

EDUCATION

During the past 12 years, substantial PADRECC-wide educational outreach has taken place for patients and their caregivers. Educational programs are delivered via the PADRECC websites, live and recorded streaming video conferences, printed materials, newsletters, and in-person dialogue. Additionally, all PADRECC sites host well-attended support groups tailored to a variety of constituencies, such as younger patients, family members, caregivers, DBS patients, and patients with advanced disease. The PADRECCs have collaborated on a variety of educational programs for VA and community clinicians. The PADRECCs sponsor weekly and monthly conferences targeting local and regional health care providers. National broadcasts deliver education to VA providers across the system, and a series of bi-annual conferences have provided attendees with updates on the latest scientific and clinical advances in the field. Through sponsorship by the

VHA Office of Academic Affiliations, the PADRECCs have developed robust clinical fellowship programs in movement disorders, with dozens of fellows training at various PADRECCs and their academic affiliates. Subsequently, many of these fellows have joined VA facilities to continue caring for the veterans.

NATIONAL VA PARKINSON'S DISEASE CONSORTIUM

In 2003, the PADRECCs established the National VA Parkinson's Disease Consortium to broaden the impact of their mission and to encourage the delivery of leading edge PD care across the collective VA health care system (VAHCS). The highlight of this initiative was the creation of the Consortium Center Network that encompasses a hub-and-spoke model of care between the 6 PADRECCs and 52 dedicated movement disorder clinics at various VA facilities across the VAHCS. The PADRECC and Consortium clinicians work in partnership to ensure convenient access to specialized care for all veterans affected by PD and related movement disorders. The PADRECCs maintain the momentum of the Consortium initiative through national educational offerings, training opportunities, peer collaboration, and mentorship.

CONCLUSION

Over a decade ago, the VHA embarked on a unique effort to develop specialized centers to provide expert care to veterans with PD and other movement disorders. During that period, the PADRECCs

and their collaborators at the Consortium Centers have created a network of programs that deliver comprehensive medical care and conduct collaborative and site-based research. Additionally, they provide high-quality educational opportunities to patients, their caregivers, health care providers, and clinical trainees. The scope, depth, and comprehensive approach to PD care that operates in such an integrated and collaborative manner is unparalleled. For additional information on the PADRECCs and the National VA Parkinson's Disease Consortium, please visit <http://www.parkinsons.va.gov>. ●

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