

THE BRIDGE

BRIDGING RESEARCH AND VETERANS HEALTH CARE

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Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi Celebrates Veterans Day with NCIRE



"There's a saying among the troops that you leave no man behind. We aim to make that, leave no veteran behind either."
— Nancy Pelosi

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) joined uniformed service members, veterans, dignitaries, and members of the SFVAMC and NCIRE communities in celebrating Veterans Day at SFVAMC on November 10, 2008.

In her remarks, Speaker Pelosi thanked all veterans for their service to America. She reiterated her commitment to "building a future in honor of their sacrifice" and emphasized that the goal of Congress is to put veterans first.

Speaker Pelosi, a steadfast supporter of veterans health research, spoke passionately about proposed legislation to bolster suicide prevention programs for military personnel as well as efforts to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health treatment. She was joined by State Senator Leland Yee, who presented a letter of recognition to SFVAMC. On a personal note, Senator Yee spoke about the high-quality care his father received as an SFVAMC patient.

Local ABC7 personality Cheryl Jennings was also a guest speaker.

The Emmy award-winning KGO-TV anchor, a strong advocate for troops and veterans, served as host of NCIRE's "Above and Beyond" gala in the fall of 2007. ABC7 continues to make PTSD resources available on its website at <http://webblog.abc7news.com/2008/09/resources-for-v.html>

LTC Sloane Guy, MD, an active-duty US Army physician and SFVAMC cardiothoracic surgeon, applauded the high quality of care provided to SFVAMC patients and remarked that "this should be the standard of care" for veterans around the country. In an effort to improve treatment of wounded troops, Dr. Guy recently conducted Department of Defense-sponsored research exploring the feasibility of remote electronic telementoring of battlefield surgeons.



The Speaker thanked veterans for their service to the country.

Photos by Ed Caballero

NCIRE - The Veterans Health Research Institute

NCIRE is a self-funded private nonprofit research institute, established to administer health research at the San Francisco VA Medical Center. NCIRE is the largest of the 85 nonprofit research institutes associated with the Department of Veterans Affairs nationwide.

NCIRE and Department of Defense Recognize Neuroscience Researchers



“Welcome Home” Greets Troops, Veterans

Message from the Executive Director

On October 29, 2008, NCIRE celebrated six years of research partnership with the Defense Department when representatives from DoD, SFVAMC, and NCIRE gathered at SFVAMC for the fourth annual Neuroscience Center of Excellence Investigator Day. The meeting brought together investigators, policy makers, and others to review and discuss current and future neuroscience research projects funded by DoD.



Guests and presenters gather for DoD Investigator Day, held in the SFVAMC Auditorium.

Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury. General Sutton participated with keen interest in the day's proceedings, which presented current and future research efforts from the perspective of the life course of the warrior, from pre-deployment to battle to life after service.

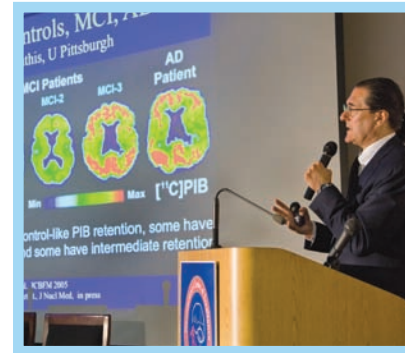
Since 2003, the Neuroscience Center of Excellence has received over \$25 million in DoD funds. The money supports research projects focusing on advanced brain imaging technology for diagnosis and treatment neurological diseases and conditions suffered by veterans and active military personnel. Funds are distributed annually to select NCIRE and SFVAMC investigators after a rigorous peer-reviewed assessment of their research proposals by a panel of outside experts.

The latest appropriation of \$5 million for fiscal year 2009 was included in the Department of Defense funding bill signed on October 1, 2008. “This is a real vote of confidence from our military medical colleagues,” said NCIRE Executive Director Robert E. Obana. “They see the progress we have made over the years and recognize that our investigators are on a path to some real breakthroughs in diagnosing and treating post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and other neurological consequences of combat.”

The guest of honor was Brigadier General Loree K. Sutton, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury and Director of the Defense Center of



Brigadier General Loree K. Sutton, MD



Michael Weiner, MD presents at this year's DoD Investigator Day on October 29.

New Media Project Aims to Reduce the Stigma of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

NCIRE is producing and distributing “Welcome Home,” a video about PTSD designed to provide encouragement and health information to returning service members, veterans, and their families.

“While most troops return from Iraq and Afghanistan whole, a significant number come back with post-traumatic stress disorder,” explains media consultant Ann Fox, who is producing the project on behalf of NCIRE. “Unfortunately, PTSD carries a stigma because it is diagnosed and treated by mental health professionals. So warriors and veterans often decline treatment, and risk profoundly damaging their lives.”

Fox says the video is divided into three segments. In the first, troops and veterans share their personal experiences in confronting PTSD and seeking treatment. In the second segment, NCIRE researchers describe the symptoms of PTSD and explain that it is a real medical illness with underlying physiological consequences. “For this segment,” explains Fox, “we recruited the Blue Star Moms, an organization of parents whose children are in the service, to pose questions such as ‘Why is high-risk behavior often associated with PTSD?’ and ‘Is it possible to recover from PTSD?’” The final segment provides an overview of PTSD resources and explains how veterans and their families can access them.

The video concludes with a montage of community members saying “Welcome home” to the troops. “The ‘welcome’ greetings were inspired by a comment made by a young Marine we interviewed for the first segment,” recalls Fox. “He says, essentially, that anyone who has served in Iraq and Afghanistan has paid a price emotionally and sometimes physically, and that whatever your politics, the right thing to do is simply say to them, ‘Welcome home.’ So that’s what we do.”

While NCIRE has received financial support to defray some production costs, more is needed. If you are interested in contributing to this effort, please contact our new Director of Development, Robin Morjikian (see story below) at robin.morjikian@ncire.org or (415) 750-6643.

In these extraordinary times of economic uncertainty, many of us are concerned about the future, and rightly so. It can be difficult to plan ahead, either personally or professionally, when seemingly every day there is fresh news of organizations suddenly in dire need of government aid.

Fortunately, NCIRE-The Veterans Health Research Institute—continues to be fiscally and organizationally sound. We are well-positioned to make good progress in our mission to advance veterans health through research.

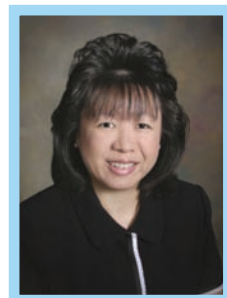
Thanks to the cutting-edge work of our immensely talented and hardworking investigators, the dedication of our support staff, and a solid fiscal and administrative infrastructure, we are in an excellent position to achieve our objectives. With the help of our devoted friends and supporters, we are reaffirming our commitment to build upon our many strengths and expand our research in service to veterans.

On behalf of NCIRE and the veterans we serve, I would like to personally thank you for your contributions to our stability and long-term strength. I wish you well for the new year and look forward with great enthusiasm to a prosperous 2009.

Warm regards,

Robert E. Obana
Executive Director
NCIRE – the Veterans Health Research Institute

Virtual Colonoscopy Pioneer Judy Yee, MD



Judy Yee, MD

Almost all colon cancers “are essentially preventable,” says Judy Yee, MD, Chief of Radiology at SFVAMC. “Colon cancer screening aims to identify precancerous polyps, which are removed before they become cancer.”

The problem, she says, is that fewer than 40 percent of Americans who should be screened for colon cancer actually get screened, mostly because conventional colonoscopy is viewed

as invasive and unpleasant. “And so, colon cancer remains the third most common cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States.”

For more than a decade, Dr. Yee has been developing an alternative: virtual colonoscopy, which uses safe, noninvasive x-ray technology to create a detailed three-dimensional picture of the colon and surrounding organs in just a few minutes. Working with SFVAMC

veterans in a series of landmark clinical trials, she has built up a formidable body of evidence demonstrating that virtual colonoscopy is as accurate as conventional colonoscopy in identifying precancerous lesions. Much of her research has been supported by NCIRE.

Her work is bearing fruit. In recently issued joint guidelines, the American Cancer Society, the U.S. Multi-Society Task Force, and the American College of Radiology endorsed virtual colonoscopy as a screening option. “Following that endorsement,” reports Dr. Yee, “Medicare is now calling for public comment on potential national coverage of virtual colonoscopy for colorectal cancer screening.”

Dr. Yee, a member of the NCIRE Board of Directors, has literally written the book on the subject: “Virtual Colonoscopy,” published last year by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. “It was a true labor of love,” she says. “I was able to pull together everything that I’ve learned and everything that we’ve developed here into the most current, complete textbook on the topic.” She reports that it is on its way to becoming the standard text in the field.

NCIRE Welcomes New Director of Development

Robin Morjikian has joined NCIRE as Director of Development. In that capacity, she will work closely with Executive Director Robert Obana and Board Chair Paul Volberding, MD to manage and expand NCIRE’s growing development effort.

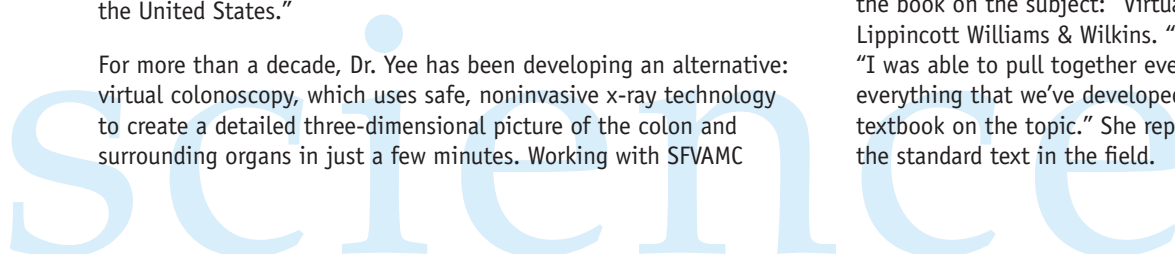
Ms. Morjikian joins NCIRE from the University of California, San Francisco Center for the Health Professions, where she worked for 11 years running an advanced leadership program for senior nurse executives funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Mr. Obana noted, “We are fortunate to have recruited Robin from our academic affiliate, UCSF. She has joined us at just the right moment to help NCIRE build its development program.”

“This is an exciting time at NCIRE,” said Ms. Morjikian. “I am delighted to be joining such a talented team of professionals in support of NCIRE’s mission to advance veterans health through research.”



Robin Morjikian



NCIRE News Briefs

2008

October 15

A national research group headed by Michael Weiner, MD, Director of the Center for the Imaging of Neurodegenerative Diseases at SFVAMC, was granted a \$6.04 million Biomedical Technology Research Centers Award from the National Institutes of Health. The award will be used to improve magnetic resonance imaging technologies to better diagnose and track neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease. "In the face of the coming Alzheimer's epidemic, it's essential that we have the most sensitive possible imaging technologies at our disposal," said Dr. Weiner, who Principal Investigator of the DOD/VA/NCIRE Neuroscience Center of Excellence, which focuses on neurological diseases affecting warriors and veterans.

October 24

Active elderly women scored better on tests of mental function than less active women, according to a study led by Deborah E. Barnes, PhD, MPH, a mental health researcher at SFVAMC and an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at UCSF. The study analyzed the daily daytime activity levels of 2,736 women over the course of three days. "More daytime movement was especially associated with better executive function, which is the ability to plan and execute daily tasks," said Dr. Barnes. The women's average age was 83.

November 26

A nationwide study of over 280,000 women showed that postmenopausal women who are overweight or obese have advanced breast cancer at significantly higher rates than women of normal weight or less than normal weight. The study, published in the November 26, 2008 issue of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, was led by Karla Kerlikowske, MD, a physician at SFVAMC and a Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology, and Biostatistics at UCSF. "The reason may be that being overweight increases circulating estrogen, which in turn promotes tumor growth," said Dr. Kerlikowske.

November 26

Depressed heart disease patients are more likely to smoke, not exercise, and not take medications correctly than those who are not depressed, thereby putting themselves at greater risk for illness and death, according to a study of over 1,000 heart patients led by Mary Whooley, MD, an SFVAMC physician and a Professor of Medicine at UCSF. The study appeared in the November 26, 2008 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. "Now we have a clue to the link between depression and bad outcomes among people with heart disease," said Dr. Whooley, a co-investigator on a DOD-sponsored study of PTSD, cardiovascular health, and mortality.



NCIRE

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