



What's New at the PVAMC Translational Musculoskeletal Research Center?



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Aches and pains are a part of daily life and normal aging. However, musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions can also arise as a direct consequence of military service, with associated trauma and accidents. In fact, MSK diseases and related disabilities are more prevalent in Veterans than in the general population. Furthermore, while improvements in armor and “in theater” medical care has introduced incredible life-saving technologies, an increasing number of our wounded soldiers return home with damaged limbs and joints. Also, as with any population, when veterans age, there is an increasing tendency to develop arthritis and various degenerative joint diseases, each of which can significantly compromise quality of life. In response, the Department of Veterans’ Affairs has focused research efforts to improve our understanding of the function of MSK tissues and injuries that occur to them, with the goal of developing novel technologies to enhance tissue repair, regeneration, and ultimately function.

In keeping with this goal, the last several years have witnessed a dramatic growth in VA-sponsored MSK research across the nation, with one of the largest increases occurring at our Corporal Michael Crescenz VA Medical Center (CMC VAMC) in Philadelphia. Physician investigators, basic scientists, and engineers at the CMC VAMC, together with colleagues

from the University of Pennsylvania, are currently carrying out research projects focused on the injury and repair of MSK tissues, including tendons, ligaments, disc, bone, meniscus, and cartilage. Additional studies are underway to develop new technologies that may one day aid in the replacement of these tissues and ultimately improve function and quality of life. In keeping with this research focus, the CMC VAMC established the Translational Musculoskeletal Research Center (TMRC) in 2013. This Center brings together investigators from Orthopaedic Surgery, Rheumatology, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Neurosurgery, and Bioengineering all under one roof, in >9,000 sq. ft. of newly renovated research space. Drs. George Dodge and Robert Mauck co-direct this enterprise with input, advice, and support from a joint PVAMC/Penn TMRC Advisory Committee.

The goal of the TMRC is to develop a focused, internationally recognized research center at the CMC VAMC and to emerge as a VA Center of Excellence, bringing new resources and regenerative technologies to all service members, past and present. To date, more than 30 VA-based physicians, scientists, bioengineers, and research staff have co-localized to the newly renovated, state-of-the-art research space at the CMC VAMC Medical Research Building. Current VA funding to these investigators has increased to >\$2 million in direct costs per year. In addition, the VA has committed more than \$6.5 million in equipment to outfit this facility, including state-of-the-art devices such as vivo micro-CT, fluoroscopy, atomic force microscopy and nano-indentation, super-resolution, confocal, multiphoton, and light-sheet imaging. Overall, the TMRC is on an upward trajectory, with a vibrant multi-disciplinary team of investigators and significant new funding directed towards making possible new discoveries in musculoskeletal repair and regeneration. The TMRC is committed to our goal of translating this research into life changing improvements in patient care and quality of life for both Veterans and the general population.