

## **VGEC Receives \$5 Million to Renew Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program**

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As the United States continues to grow older, the Virginia Geriatric Education Center (VGEC) in the College of Health Professions at Virginia Commonwealth University has been awarded a \$5 million grant to improve geriatrics care in the state. Improved workforce recruitment and retention as well as development, implementation, and dissemination of new and better models of care is needed. The VGEC's goal is to develop this workforce to provide age-friendly and dementia-friendly care for older adults across Virginia.

The five-year award from the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) is not new to Virginia. "We have had a Geriatric Education Center at VCU since 1985" said VGEC Director Bert Waters, PhD. "We were one of the original 'sweet 16' GECs across the nation funded by HRSA. The funding mechanism changed from GECs to GWEPs in 2015, and many of the GECs received this funding in the first two cycles. Forty-two awards were made in this cycle, and it is exciting to see our state continue to receive the funding. GWEPs and Geriatric Academic Career Awards are the only geriatrics education line item in the Federal budget. As this year's President of the [National Association for Geriatrics Education](#), I was taken aback by some of the excellent GWEPs that were not funded this cycle. It was a very competitive call, and I believe our GECs strength is that we are a statewide consortium of six universities, George Mason University, Virginia Tech, UVA, VCU, and Eastern Virginia Medical School (which is merging with Old Dominion this summer), two health systems, VCU and Riverside, and VirginiaNavigator, a nonprofit organization that provides free information about health and aging resources available to Virginians. The Center for Optimal Aging at Marymount University has recently agreed to join the consortium as our sixth University. Many faculty and clinicians across multiple disciplines contribute expertise to this work."

"Our CIRCAA program, Creating Interprofessional Readiness for Complex and Aging Adults, is the cornerstone of our many initiatives," said Sarah Marrs, PhD, Director of the CIRCAA program and Director of Research for the VGEC. This program aims to expand age-friendly, person-centered care using the John A. Hartford Foundations 4Ms model as a guiding framework. Many of the faculty and staff who are part of the CIRCAA team were once Scholars themselves in this interprofessional development program geared toward both clinicians and faculty in the health professions. We have had numerous Scholars complete the program since its original inception in 2010, many of whom go on to become leaders in geriatrics care and education across the Commonwealth.

"An exciting aspect of this award is the opportunity to work with new partners to broaden the scope of our work to reach tribal and rural communities in Virginia", said Patty Slattum, PharmD, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator on the grant. Examples of new partnerships include the Chickahominy Indian Tribe in Charles City County Virginia and Virginia's Community Pharmacy Expanded Services Network (CPESN). We will work in partnership with the Chickahominy to engage medical students with tribal elders in our intergenerational mentoring

program and to identify needs of the tribal community to support tribal elders and increase access to age-friendly services. We hope to take what we learn from the Chickahominy tribe to expand to other tribal communities in Virginia. We will work with the Virginia CPESN and the Virginia Pharmacy Association to develop an age-friendly apprenticeship training program for pharmacy technicians who are also trained as community health workers to better connect older adults living the rural communities served by rural independent community pharmacies in Virginia with resources and information to support age-friendly communities.

Dr. Annie Rhodes, Director of Evaluation for the VGEC and Director of the Virginia Memory Project said “The next 5 years of the VGEC will continue to expand our reach within Virginia. We will begin by rooting in the community and conducting comprehensive mixed-methods needs assessment. This assessment will help the VGEC understand how to create robust, culturally competent and accessible training initiatives to all Virginians.” Results of the assessment will be shared with our various initiative cores (Age Friendly Designation, Alzheimer’s Disease and related Disorders, Long-Term Care, and Age-Friendly Education and Training.) Dr. Rhodes will be leading the ADRD core. “The VGEC is looking forward to supporting the role of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation [GUIDE Dementia Program](#)” she said. “We will support Navigators with ongoing education.”

The development and maintenance of Age-Friendly Health Systems (AFHS) is being led by Dr. Kristin Zimmerman. “Our AFHS champion program aims to enhance the care of older adults in the commonwealth by scaling up existing efforts to provide age friendly care. We hope that by strengthening quality improvement practices, community-building within and among healthcare practices, and targeting the health ecosystem, it is likely that sites will strengthen and sustain age-friendly practices.” Said Dr. Zimmerman, an Associate Professor, the Department of Pharmacotherapy & Outcomes Science.

“It is perfect timing for many of these initiatives to succeed,” said Dr. Waters. “House bill HB933 just passed this session to require Alzheimer's disease and dementia training for dispatchers, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel. One of our GWEP faculty, Kimberly Davis, a Clinical Assistant Professor in the VCU Department of Family and Community Health Nursing, was providing an EMS training on Age-Friendly Dementia Care at Virginia Tech on June 11<sup>th</sup> when the organizers, who had just been informed about HB933’s passing, asked for any assistance possible to comply with the new law. This just happens to be one of the initiatives that we included in our proposal, and we will be able to support first responder dementia capable training for the next five years.”