Why is Participation Important?

The advances the VACS study has made over the course of its existence are very substantial; however there is still a long way to go. It is not only important to know about the conditions that may go along with HIV infection, but also how to treat such conditions and ultimately improve quality of life. The information from our Veterans has allowed us to gain a vast amount of insight into aging with and without HIV infection, and we hope for their continued support and participation that will allow us to provide the best care possible.

VACS in the News

- The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), interviewed and wrote an article about Dr. Matthew Freiberg entitled “epidemiologist immerses himself in big data as he studies the link between HIV and Cardiovascular Disease”, posted December 2013.
- HIV InSite posted an article in December 2013, entitled “Polypharmacy in HIV-infected individuals,” which referenced Dr. Jennifer Edelman’s oral presentation from ID week 2013 entitled, “HIV+ individuals on ART are at risk of polypharmacy: more medication increases mortality.”

VACS and Affiliated Cohorts Involvement in Upcoming Conferences

21st Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) Boston, Massachusetts, March 3-6, 2014:
- Sixteen presentations including:
  - Four young investigator awards
  - Four themed poster sessions

18th International Workshop on HIV Observational Databases (IWHOD), Sitges, Spain, March 27-29, 2014:
- Eight presentations including:
  - Five oral presentations
  - Three poster presentations

37th Annual Society of General Internal Medicine (SGIM) Meeting, San Diego, California, April 23-26, 2014:
- Two presentations including:
  - One oral presentation
  - One poster presentation

About VACS

The Veterans Aging Cohort Study (VACS) is an observational study that compares HIV-positive and HIV-negative veterans in care in the United States. The purpose of this study is to better understand HIV infection and how outside forces, such as alcohol use, smoking, and other diseases and infections, can influence the people living with and without HIV. The study consists of two cohorts, a “virtual cohort” that uses data from over 120,000 veterans, and a “living cohort” of over 7,000 veterans that actively participate and receive medical care at one of our nine VACS locations: Atlanta, Baltimore, Bronx, Brooklyn/Manhattan, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Washington DC. The information received from these cohorts has played a large role in increasing knowledge about HIV infection and aging and the lives of those infected. We cannot thank our Veterans enough for their continued participation in this study.
Matthew Goetz
PI Los Angeles Site

Dr. Matthew Goetz, MD, is the Principal Investigator at VACS Los Angeles, a position he has held since Los Angeles became a VACS site in 2001. He is Chief of Infectious Diseases, Director of the HIV/AIDS Center and Clinic, and a staff physician at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. Dr. Goetz is a Clinical Professor of Medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is the Clinical Coordinator for the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) HIV/Hepatitis and a member of the VA HIV and HCV Technical Advisory Groups, the Infectious Diseases Field Advisory Committee and the Pharmacy Benefits Management Medical Advisory Panel. He is the author of over 130 peer-reviewed publications and has more than $250,000/year of research funding. Overall he has over twenty years experience in multi-site, NIH-sponsored, HIV clinical trials. He has experience in both HIV disease and clinical quality improvement. For over ten years he has been involved in research related to HIV co-morbidities and complications in an aging HIV infected population.

David Leaf
Co-PI Los Angeles Site

Dr. David A. Leaf, MD, MPH is Co-Principal Investigator at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare center, a position he has held since 2001. Academically he is Professor of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Medicine. In addition to delivering patient care in the Ambulatory Care General Medicine Clinic, Dr. Leaf has an active role as a Clinician Educator supervising medical students and resident physicians. Dr. Leaf has had a longstanding involvement in the area of clinical research with a special interest in cholesterol metabolism and heart disease prevention. VACS investigators recently showed that HIV-infected patients are a high-risk group for heart disease. Efforts to identify reasons for increased risk and potential treatments for HIV-infected patients have made VACS an important part of Dr. Leaf’s research.

Barbara Serkuczewska
Los Angeles Site Coordinator

Barbara Serkuczewska has worked at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare center since 1995. She has been study coordinator for VACS ID since 2009. In addition to VACS, she works on several research studies including Norovirus and the Antimicrobial Stewardship Project. Barbara is responsible for coordinating IRB submissions for the ID Department. She has also worked in Gastrointestinal research at the University of California, Los Angeles and the VA.

Shyla Smith
Los Angeles Site Coordinator

Shyla Smith is a VACS coordinator and joined the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare center VACS team in 2009. She has worked in the research department for seven years and coordinated various research projects within the VA hospital including Multiple Sclerosis and Hepatitis-C studies. She is currently obtaining her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology and hopes to serve the veteran population as a Clinical Psychologist at the VA upon completion of her degree. Her academic interests include mental health and understanding the systemic causes of homelessness, unemployment, and poverty among the veteran population. She is currently working on identifying ways to help resolve these issues.

Wendy Rossen
Los Angeles Site Coordinator

Wendy Rossen joined VACS in 2009 to work on the VACS Cardiology Sub-study. She has been study coordinator at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare center since 2002, originally working on SMART, ESPRIT, and STALWART. Previously, she worked for AIDS Healthcare Foundation coordinating pharmaceutical studies including Zigen, Sustiva, Preveon and Agenerase and the NIH AIDS Tissue Bank study in conjunction with the University of California, Los Angeles.

FEATURED SITE: LOS ANGELES

The Los Angeles site is one of our nine VACS sites across the country, and is located within the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center. Dr. Matthew Goetz is the Principal Investigator, and works with Dr. David Leaf, Co-Principal Investigator, and Site Coordinators, Barbara Serkuczewska, Shyla Smith, and Wendy Rossen.
What is the EXHALE Study?
EXHALE is the Examinations of HIV Associated Lung Emphysema study, a prospective, observational study of HIV infected and uninfected participants. EXHALE has been funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI). Participants have been enrolled at four of the VACS sites, namely Atlanta, the Bronx, Houston and Los Angeles VA Medical Centers. Over 370 participants have been enrolled, about half of whom have HIV infection. Participants have completed questionnaires; performed tests to measure their lung function (also called pulmonary function tests or PFTs); underwent computed tomography (CT) scans of their chest; and performed 6-minute walk tests as part of the study. Participants also provided a blood and urine sample, and some underwent a bronchoscopy to obtain fluid from their lungs. Patient follow-up is now completed, though analyses of the data collected is ongoing.

What have we learned through EXHALE?
We have learned that opportunistic pneumonias like Pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP) that occur in patients with severely compromised immune systems are less common, and chronic lung diseases – particularly those related to smoking – have become increasingly frequent in persons living with HIV. Some of our recent findings include:

- One of the most common lung diseases in persons living with HIV now is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), of which emphysema is a subtype.
- COPD is an important risk factor for hospitalization in persons living with HIV.
- COPD substantially increases the risk for pneumonia in persons living with HIV.
- The ability of the lung to exchange gas (also called the diffusing capacity measurement on PFTs) is decreased in individuals with HIV infection.
- Abnormalities in lung function may contribute to decreases in exercise ability in persons with HIV.
- HIV infection also increases the risk for lung cancer, even after accounting for cigarette smoking.

We don’t yet understand why many of these lung abnormalities are increased in persons living with HIV. The inflammation that is associated even with treated HIV infection may contribute to the increased risk. Given that many of the diseases are also related to smoking, our findings also highlight how important it is for people living with HIV to quit smoking.

Why Study Lung Disease?
Lung diseases have been leading causes of illness, disability, and death amongst persons living with HIV since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. As patients with HIV are living longer on effective antiretroviral therapy, the types of lung diseases affecting persons living with HIV may be changing. Investigators within VACS have been conducting EXHALE to determine the different types of lung diseases in patients with HIV infection. We are also investigating whether lung diseases are caused by different risk factors or progress differently in people with HIV infection.

Incidence of lung diseases per 1000-person years in HIV-infected and uninfected Veterans

EXHALE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
We want to thank the participants, study site investigators, and coordinators for making the EXHALE study a success over the past 6 years. Without them, we would have no study. Their hard work has contributed to important insights into the types of lung disease occurring in persons living with HIV infection.

**Recent EXHALE publications can be found on the following page**
Article Links:
- HIV InSite’s article on Dr. Jennifer Edelman’s oral presentation at ID week: http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/inSITE?page=hmq-1312-01

Affiliated Programs & Resources:
- Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS: http://www.cira.med.yale.edu
- American Foundation for AIDS Research (AMFAR): http://www.amfar.org
- Project Inform: http://www.projectinform.org
- US Department of Veterans Affairs: http://www.va.gov
- National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse: http://www.niaaa.nih.gov
- The Graying of AIDS: http://www.grayingoafids.org/
- Antiretroviral Therapy Cohort Collaboration (ART-CC): http://www.bristol.ac.uk/art-cc/

Funding and Affiliated Funding Sources:
VACS is funded primarily by the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse, National Institutes of Health. The study has a special focus on the role of alcohol use and abuse in determining clinical outcomes. This project is also funded in kind by the US Department of Veterans Affairs and by supplemental support from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Cancer Institute and the Medical Research Council.

Funding and Affiliated Funding Sources:

Please visit the VACS website at www.vacohort.org
For any questions or concerns please contact Angela Consorte at angela.consorte@va.gov or 203.932.5711 ext. 3541