



AMY C. JUSTICE, M.D., Ph.D., is section chief of general medicine at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System and professor of medicine and public health at Yale University. She is the principal investigator of the VACS, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health. Her research examines the complex and interacting roles of aging, substance use, treatment, adherence, and medical and psychiatric comorbid illness in determining patient relevant outcomes for people aging with and without HIV infection. Dr. Justice has published over 250 manuscripts. She frequently lectures and she advises the National Cancer Institute as a member of the ad hoc Subcommittee on HIV and AIDS Malignancy, the HIV and Aging Working Group, NIH Office of AIDS Research and the White House Office of National AIDS Policy. In 2012, Dr. Justice was recognized as one of 100 Most Influential Professors of Public Health in the United States.

VACS: Pioneering HIV Research Efforts

VA is the nation's largest provider of care to those with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). More than half of Veterans with HIV are over age 50, and many suffer from other medical and psychiatric diseases, too. The Veterans Aging Cohort Study (VACS)¹ has made significant advances in diagnosing and treating those patients, thanks in part to Principal Investigator Amy Justice, M.D., Ph.D.

"We look beyond one diagnosis and try to understand the health experience for patients given all of their conditions," she explains.

The VACS relies on a virtual cohort of approximately 50,000 HIV infected Veterans who receive VA care. A sub-study includes additional participants at eight sites. Comparing the data of infected individuals against similar Veterans (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.) who do not have the virus helps researchers understand how aging with HIV is similar to—and different than—aging without it.

"We offer excellent care for HIV, but we must also prioritize screening and treatment options for patients' comorbid conditions," says Dr. Justice.

The VACS team's contributions are noteworthy.

¹ The VACS mission is to build and disseminate the evidence needed to optimize health care for people aging with HIV infection.

"We demonstrated that HIV drives certain other conditions, including heart disease, liver disease, and many forms of cancer," Dr. Justice says. "People with the virus who get good treatment are at less risk for these other diseases than people who do not get treated, but both groups are at greater risk than those without HIV. That is one of the biggest contributions our study has made to international literature."

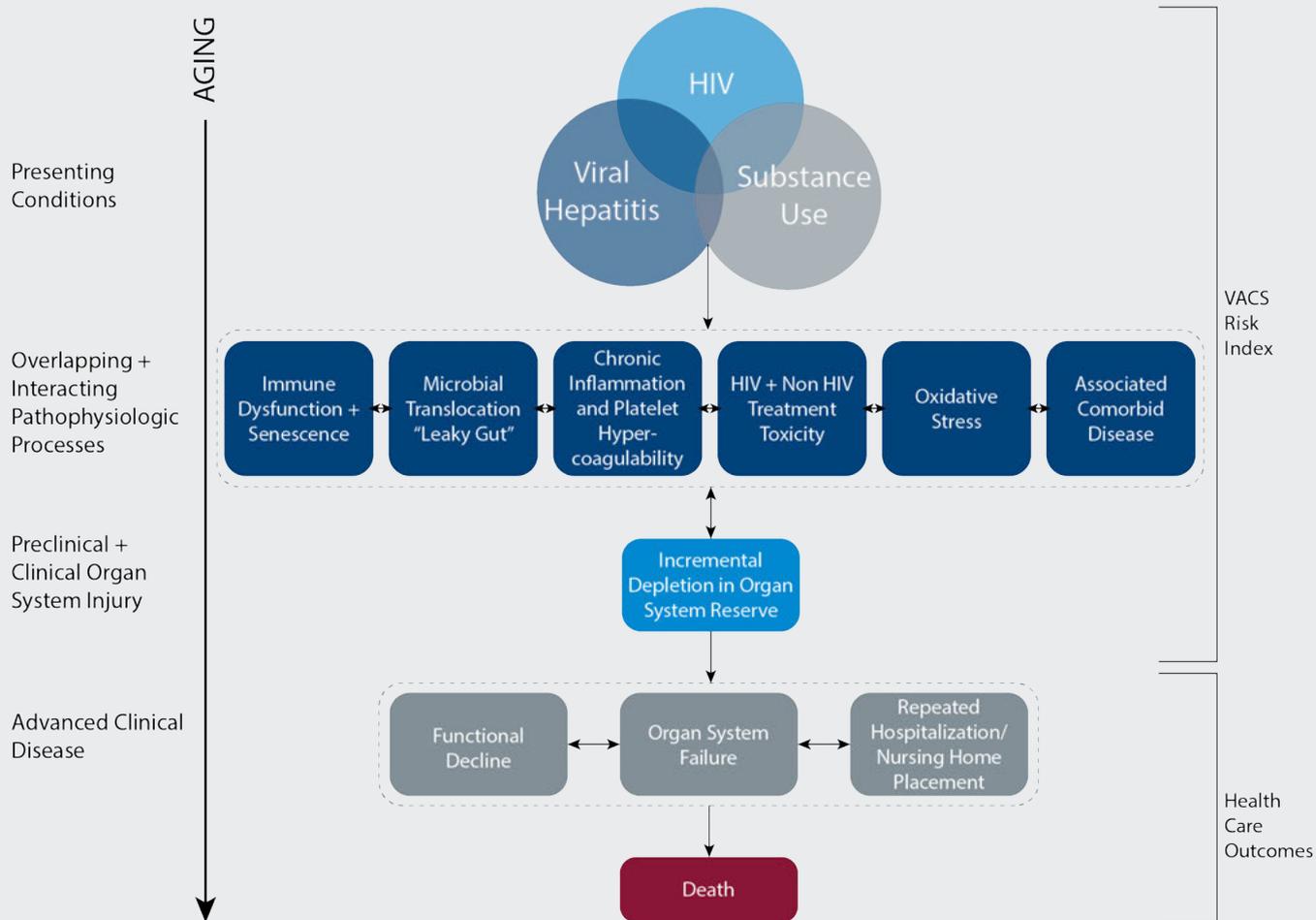
Dr. Justice is understandably proud of the education, training, and career development support the VACS group offers researchers and methodologists.

"Ours is the largest cohort study of people with HIV in North America and a great example of what the VA system brings to research," she continues. "With our electronic records, we can describe patterns of health and health care in a way few other groups can."

That luxury did not exist for Dr. Justice 20 years ago. Instead, she and the VACS team blazed a trail for other researchers.

"I was the first investigator to collect electronic data from multiple sites for a study like this," she says, "and the team was one of the first to share data outside the VA." VACS investigators and collaborators now span North America and Europe, with a Coordinating Center at the West Haven VA Medical Center.

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF AGING WITH HIV



Justice AC. HIV and Aging: Time for a New Paradigm. *Curr HIV/AIDS Rep.* 2010 May;7(2):69-76

Veterans Aging Cohort Study Team

