



Issue 9, January 2019

NEWS & VIEWS from the VCBH

*Investigating the relationships between behavior and
the risk for chronic disease & premature death.*

Preventive Medicine Fifth Special Issue, December 2018

The [December 2018 Special Issue of Preventive Medicine](#) (PM) is the fifth in a series that focuses on behavior change, health, and health disparities. Contributors to these Special Issues are selected from participants in the 2017 VCBH 5th Annual Conference on Tobacco Regulatory Science.

The topics covered in this Special Issue are specific to [tobacco regulatory science](#), a field which assures that the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center of Tobacco Products (CTP) has the multidisciplinary scientific input necessary to conduct evidence-based regulation. More specifically, this issue focuses on a set of three current topics in tobacco regulatory science:



- 1) Examining current research examining the effects of a potential national policy that would **reduce the nicotine levels in cigarettes to minimally addictive levels.**
 - 2) Increasing scientific understanding on the **risk and patterns of cigarette smoking and other tobacco use in vulnerable populations.**
 - 3) Potential **role of e-cigarettes and other non-combusted sources of nicotine as less harmful substitutes for combusted products** for those unwilling or unable to quite nicotine use.
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New Research Grant Awards

SAMHSA Grant Aims to Expand Medication Assisted Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder



University of Vermont (UVM) Faculty, [Richard Rawson PhD](#), and **Scott Mackey, PhD**, along with University of Vermont Medical Center (UVMHC) Psychiatrist, **Sanchit Maruti, MD**, and Emergency Medicine Physician, **Daniel Wolfson, MD**, have been awarded a 3-year grant aimed at expanding medication assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder (OUD) in emergency departments (ED's) around the state.

The current practice of providing ED patients with OUD with a referral to treatment is often a missed opportunity to engage patients in MAT. Funded by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** (SAMHSA), this grant will allow three Vermont medical centers the opportunity to establish a new intervention to initiate treatment for those presenting with OUD at the ED, then transfer these patients to a community treatment center.

NIH Award Examines Interventions to Increase Cardiac Rehabilitation Participation Among Low-SES Patients

[Diann Gaalema, PhD](#), has received funding for an NIH-sponsored R61 award that will examine the efficacy of **using early case management and financial incentives for increasing cardiac rehabilitation (CR) participation among lower**

socioeconomic status (SES) patients. Participation in outpatient CR has shown to decrease morbidity and mortality for patients hospitalized with for various heart conditions. However, only 10-35% of patients for whom CR is recommended, choose to participate. Low-SES is a strong indicator of non-CR participation, therefore there is a strong need to increase CR participation within this population. Both case management and financial incentives are proven effective in altering behaviors and promoting adherence to health-related regimens.



2019 VCBH Conference Keynote Speaker: Dorothy Hatsukami, PhD

The [2019 VCBH Conference](#) will take place **October 10-11, 2019** in Burlington,



Vermont. This year's conference will focus on the **intersection between tobacco regulatory science and tobacco control**. The Keynote Speaker for this year's event is **Dorothy Hatsukami, PhD**. Dr. Hatsukami is the Forster Family Chair in Cancer Prevention at the Masonic Cancer Center of the University of Minnesota and Professor of Psychiatry. She is the Associate Director of Cancer Prevention and Control at the University of Minnesota Masonic Cancer Center and Director of the Tobacco Research Programs. **Registration available in the Spring!*

VCBH Faculty Profile: Stacey Sigmon, PhD

[Stacey Sigmon, PhD](#), is an **Associate Professor with Tenure** at the University of Vermont with the VCBH. She currently serves as **Director of the Chittenden Clinic Opioid Treatment Program**, which is the first and largest opioid treatment clinic in Vermont. Most recently, Dr. Sigmon was elected to serve as President of the oldest national scientific organization on addiction, The College on Problems of Drug Dependence.

1. You recently developed an exciting interim treatment approach to help opioid-dependent individuals who cannot access treatment. Can you explain this method of treatment and how it can help those on waiting lists?



While maintenance treatment with methadone or buprenorphine is the most effective treatment for opioid dependence, an alarming number of clinics have long waitlists for treatment slots. And even more folks who really need treatment are not able or willing to enter typical clinics due to economic or practical barriers, concerns about stigma or privacy, or other factors. These delays and barriers leave individuals at very high risk for overdose, infectious disease and death. This is especially a problem in rural geographic areas where there are fewer treatment providers.

We developed a **technology-assisted interim dosing approach** to try and reduce these risks while patients are awaiting more comprehensive treatment. It involves **maintenance treatment with buprenorphine**, with each day's dose dispensed by a computerized portable device to help support adherence with the medication regimen. Patients **also receive daily monitoring calls and other support from an automated Interactive Voice Response system** we developed.

Outcomes have been fantastic so far- patients who receive Interim Buprenorphine Treatment (IBT) **achieve high levels of illicit drug abstinence, reduce their involvement in high risk behaviors like intravenous drug use**, and even **experience improvements in psychiatric distress** like anxiety and depression. We're currently conducting follow-up studies to evaluate IBT in more diverse populations and settings, and I'm optimistic about those outcomes as well. I think this and other low-barrier approaches also holds promise as a stand-alone treatment as well- not just on a temporary basis until other options become available. We need as many treatment options as we can get.

2. You have also been involved in clinical efforts to expand opioid treatment capacity more generally. Can you talk about some of those?

In an effort to expand treatment capacity and decompress our congested opioid treatment programs in Vermont, we developed a **hub-and-spoke system** whereby patients initiate treatment in a more intensive opioid treatment program setting with on-site counseling, urine toxicology testing and medical management (i.e., hub). Then, once they are stabilized and doing

well, they are transitioned to an office-based buprenorphine provider in their community (i.e., spoke) for continuation of care in a primary care setting. And, importantly, if they should destabilize while in that setting they can return to the hub for more intensive support to get back on track. I think more efforts to support this type of **partnership between specialty clinics and office-based providers** will help to expand opioid treatment capacity and improve integration of care in communities more generally.

3. There seems to be a lot going on in the area of opioid treatment research. What are you most excited about?

One of the most exciting areas has been the work by us and others on **extended-release formulations of buprenorphine**. These are depot shots or implants that can produce steady-state blood levels for week and even months following a single administration. This means that they are uniquely poised to **provide opioid maintenance while reducing patient and provider burden and risk for non-adherence, diversion and accidental exposures**; as well as reductions in frequency of clinic visits and thus burdens of time and travel especially stands to benefit patients in under-served rural areas. I think this is an especially promising new direction in opioid treatment- it has a lot of potential to **improve patient and provider experiences while increasing capacity of the larger system at the same time**.

Kurti Receives Prestigious Division 28 APA Award



[Allison Kurti, PhD](#), has received the 2019 Div 28 Young Psychopharmacologist Award! This award honors a young scientist doing original, meritorious work in psychopharmacology and encourages excellence in research at the interface between the disciplines of pharmacology and psychology. Dr. Kurti was nominated for the award by VCBH Director, Stephen Higgins, PhD.

Dr. Kurti is excited and honored to receive this award, and is deeply appreciative of the opportunities and support that her mentors, colleagues, and peers have provided her, which she feels have put her in the position to receive this honor. One of Dr. Kurti's favorite motivational quotes reads, *"Better is possible. It does not take a genius. It takes diligence. It takes moral clarity. It takes ingenuity. And above all, it takes a willingness to try"* -Atul Gawande, MD

VCBH Trainee Spotlight



In November of 2018, pre-doctoral trainee, **Heidi Melbostad, MS**, traveled to **Kigali, Rwanda** to present preliminary results from her advisor, Dr. Sarah Heil's NIH funded research aimed at **improving contraceptive use among women receiving medication treatment for opioid use disorder** at the [International Conference on Family Planning.](#)

This conference, actively supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, as well as more than 60 other organizations, convened over 3,000 researchers, scientists, policy makers and program managers from approximately 120 countries around the world to share research and clinical information to expand access to family planning services.

Heidi was also a recipient of **UVM's Suiter prize**, a merit based award, that supported attendance at this conference.

Upcoming Events

VCBH Lecture Series: Benjamin Bearnot, MD

Wednesday, February 13

UVM Medical Center Davis Auditorium

"Meeting People Who Use Drugs Where They Are: Career Development in Addiction Research and Implementation"

[View More Events](#)

Highlighted Publications

- **Gaalema DE**, Elliot RJ, Savage PD, et al. Financial incentives to increase cardiac rehabilitation participation among low-socioeconomic status patients: A randomized clinical trial. JACC: Heart Failure. In press.
- **Bergeria CL, Heil SH, Davis DR**, et al. Evaluating the utility of the modified cigarette evaluation questionnaire and cigarette purchase task for predicting acute relative reinforcing efficacy of cigarettes varying in nicotine content. Drg Alcohol Depend. In press.
- **West JC, Villanti AC**, Graham AL, et al. [Tobacco use and cessation behaviors in young adults: 2016 National Health Interview survey](#). Am J Public Health. 2019, Jan; 109(2).
- **Parker MA, Villanti AC**, Quisenberry AJ, et al. [Tobacco product harm perceptions and new use](#). Pediatrics. 2018, Dec; 142(6).
- **Nighbor TD**, Doogan NJ...**Kurti AN**, et al. [Smoking prevalence and trends among a U.S. national sample of women of reproductive age in rural versus urban settings](#). PLoS One. 2018, Nov; 13(11).

Noteworthy Events

- Former VCBH Trainee, **Alan Budney, PhD**, receives the *2019 Div 28 MED Associates Brady-Schuster Award*. This award honors a mid-career or senior scientist who conducts outstanding research underscoring the fundamental importance of behavioral science to psychopharmacology or substance abuse. Dr. Budney is Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and the Center for Technology and Behavioral Health at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth.

- VCBH Faculty, **Andrea Villanti, PhD**, discusses a on potential menthol ban, with [NPR's Marketplace](#)
- VCBH Faculty, **Richard Rawson, PhD**, speaks on current opioid use in Vermont with the [Center for Media & Democracy](#)
- VCBH Postdoc, **Kelly Peck, PhD**, gives an invited educational talk at Fairfield University, titled *"The Ongoing Opioid Epidemic: Barriers to Treatment, Novel Treatment Approaches, and Vulnerable Populations"*
- VCBH Faculty, **Stacey Sigmon, PhD** receives promotion to *Tenured Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Psychological Sciences* at the University of Vermont!

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