

OCTOBER 2021 | FALL ISSUE

WALTER REED ARMY INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER****Hello Reader,**

Using your voice to create change is a fantastic feeling—and what’s critical is knowing someone is listening. When done right, a great community engagement program allows community members to contribute to clinical research in a meaningful way while also building trusting relationships between scientists and the lay community. Traditionally, most Community Engagement work relies heavily on building trust and authentic relationships through multiple forms of face-to-face interaction. Implementing a community engagement program amidst the COVID-19 pandemic posed a challenge as it required pivoting and innovative thinking to address the lack of one of the core aspects of engagement: face-to-face interactions.

October 2021 marks the first anniversary of WRAIR’S Community Engagement (CE) project. In this newsletter, we will reflect on our one year journey so far, share how we are adapting to the challenges of doing community engagement during a pandemic, describe the opportunities of this moment, and explore what is next for WRAIR Community Engagement.

To find out more about our CE project, check out webpage at <https://www.wrair.army.mil/community-engagement>

INTRODUCTION - REFLECTING ON ONE YEAR JOURNEY**ABOUT WRAIR****WRAIR CAB HIGHLIGHTS****OUTREACH AND EDUCATION****LOOKING TO THE FUTURE****About Walter Reed Army Institute of Research(WRAIR)**

The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) is centered at the Forest Glen Annex, in Silver Spring, MD, just north of Washington, DC, and maintains a network of laboratories around the world. WRAIR’s laboratories carry out biomedical research, product development, outbreak response, and disease surveillance to support Soldier health and global health. WRAIR scientists develop and test products that will ultimately reduce the impact of some of the most dangerous and debilitating diseases. The Institute is named after Major Walter Reed, MD (1851–1902), the Army physician who studied yellow fever and demonstrated in 1901 that mosquito species transmit this deadly disease, and that mosquito eradication can protect humans from the viral infection. (While WRAIR shares the same name as the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, it is a separate institution at a different campus and focuses only on research.) Today, WRAIR conducts research on brain and behavioral health and on diverse infectious diseases, including HIV, malaria, dengue, Zika, Ebola, COVID-19 and many other pathogens. WRAIR has a Clinical Trials Center in its Forest Glen facility in which various clinical studies are carried out.

Community Advisory Board Highlights

One of the accomplishments we are most proud of from this past year is establishing a solid Community Advisory Board. Our CAB, which has ten members, four women, and six men, plays a vital role in building solid relationships between WRAIR researchers, the local community, and other stakeholders. Our CAB includes individuals from different demographic groups and occupations, and all our members have been highly committed to engaging with WRAIR and with their own community stakeholders to discuss clinical research on COVID-19. The CAB also selected a chair (see in the spotlight) and established bylaws for the operation and decision-making functions of the Board. Thus far, the CAB has convened 12 times, completed seven training sessions building research literacy and capacity, and, most notably, they put what they had learned about WRAIR and our research into action when they directly supported our clinical trial of WRAIR's own COVID-19 vaccine, called SpFN (spike ferritin nanoparticle).

As the CE team pivoted to recruiting for our SpFN trial, the CAB provided support in various ways, including offering feedback on the protocol, particularly with regard to amendments aimed to stimulate recruitment; provided feedback on recruitment outreach materials; and disseminated information about the SpFN vaccine trial within the community. In the coming year, we plan to see the CAB expand to include more diversity as well as play a significant role in outreach and education.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Deandra Godwin-Randolph, WRAIR CE CAB Chairperson

Meet Deandra Godwin-Randolph, our new and FIRST Chair for the WRAIR CAB. Deandra is also the Co-Chair for DC Community Health Workers Association and a Linkage to PrEP specialist, providing prevention coordination for AIDS Healthcare Foundation, a community based organization in Washington, D.C., and Maryland. She has over 17 years of experience in healthcare and 11 years in community outreach service. She is experienced in providing health education and STI treatment coordination. With her vast experience in public health services, her daily work focuses on coordinating patient care and reducing barriers to healthcare for populations who are at increased HIV risk. Deandra has a strong passion for working with women of color.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION-SUPPORTING RECRUITMENT



In addition to the activities designed to establish ongoing relationships and educational activities with community stakeholders, from May to beginning of July, the CE team participated in recruiting activities to directly support enrollment in WRAIR's SpFN phase I COVID-19 vaccine trial. Recruitment activities included distribution over 3000 flyers, posters and other recruitment materials at community events; 19 tabling and in-person recruiting events at various community organizations, meetings, fairs, and other local events; recruiting at an area military treatment facility (MTF) to engage with active duty service members and families; and training of active duty Soldiers at WRAIR to assist with recruitment in the local community. The recruitment activity also included close coordination with WRAIR's Clinical Trials Center recruitment team, the SpFN phase I study team, and relevant local stakeholders. The CE team developed communication strategies, weekly recruitment plans, and coordination efforts to enable the most efficient use of WRAIR resources to support the trials.

NEW WEBPAGE ALERT!

Interested in learning more about our CAB? Check out the new robust EIDB Community Engagement page at: <https://eidresearch.org/community-advisory-board/members>

Click on the link below if you wish to learn more about WRAIR CTC. <https://www.wrair.army.mil/clinical-trials-center>

Outreach and Education

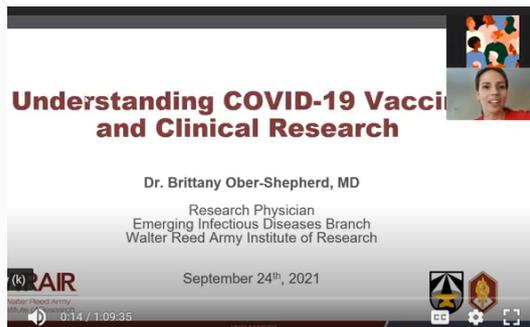
Outreach and education are the bread and butter of community engagement. Public meetings, educational events, health fairs, and pop-up activities that piggyback on other public events allow us to connect with community stakeholders. It also is an excellent opportunity to implement the ideas and feedback generated from focus groups and other community surveys as a form of education; the CE team also captures outcome data on these events to assess program effectiveness. The CE team uses six inter-related outreach activities to address our central project goals: increasing community knowledge and awareness of WRAIR research, improving trust, and addressing misperceptions/misconceptions about the clinical research enterprise. Below are some of the outreach highlights:

As of September, The CE project has:

- Actively collaborated with 15 community-based organizations through recruitment activities and educational programming.
- Conducted six focus groups, including two groups with research participants in WRAIR CTC studies; two with health care providers; and two with Spanish-speaking community members. Qualitative analysis and thematic coding of the focus groups were completed on 30 September. The final report will be available for public review by the end of 2021.
- Created a data tracking tool and subscribed 472 people to our email list.
- Provided two community engagement workshops and one WRAIR community open house
- Established two web pages, where we share ongoing educational resources, including slides, videos, upcoming events, and CAB activities with the community

We plan to continue building capacity through education to ensure people feel prepared and well informed when it comes to making decisions regarding participating in clinical research. If you missed our past couple of events, we encourage you to check out the videos below.

BE IN THE KNOW- WHAT DID YOU MISS?



<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h5Fs1BSKRoMCKbD-S907dh34S2gSgnH1/view?usp=sharing>

On Friday, September 24, 2021, the WRAIR Community Engagement Team and Prince George's Community College hosted a virtual event: Ask the Experts: Conversation about COVID Vaccines and Clinical Research. The program garnered over 60 participants from different disciplines, including but not limited to faculty and staff from PGCC, local healthcare providers, community health workers, and staff from WRAIR and the Henry Jackson Foundation (HJF). In this workshop, Dr. Brittany Ober-Shepherd, a research physician who works in vaccine clinical research at WRAIR, addressed how COVID vaccines work, how they are developed and tested, common myths and misconceptions about COVID vaccines, and clinical trials' vital role in vaccine research. Participants had an opportunity to ask questions during the webinar and hear perspectives from an experienced scientist who is actively working on COVID-19 research.

To view a video of the event please click the link on the under the image. If you are unable to click on the link please copy and paste the address into your web browser.

[Click Here](#) To sign up for our mailing list! We will keep you up to date on our educational events and resources for COVID-19 research in your community.

WRAIR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OPEN HOUSE



Building trust with community stakeholders starts at local level. On May 7th, the CE team hosted a WRAIR open house event to familiarize CAB members and selected community-based organizational leaders with WRAIR's mission, with a primary focus on efforts fighting against COVID-19. Participants learned about the full development of the SpFN vaccine and ongoing clinical trials, visited the Pilot Bioproduction Facility, and had a Q&A session with the WRAIR commander

<https://www.magisto.com/video/M0AaJwUXHzwiRAAgCzE?l=vsm&o=w&c=c>

Looking to the Future



The WRAIR CE program has established a strong framework for community engagement for WRAIR's COVID-19 research program. Key elements of the program include 1) a newly established Community Advisory Board consisting of committed representatives of local organizations, representing diverse racial and ethnic groups and backgrounds, including members with experience in clinical research; 2) collection of formative data on community perspectives using both informal interviews and structured focus group sessions; 3) robust program of outreach and education with community based organizations to establish linkages, support clinical trial recruitment deliver educational content, and enable ongoing communication; 5) an engaging web presence and newsletter for ongoing communication both within WRAIR, to our research community, and to outside stakeholders; and a solid database of community contacts. This CE framework is well-positioned to support ongoing COVID-19 clinical research activity at WRAIR's Clinical Trial Center.

Looking to the future, we steadfastly aim to remain committed to working on our main five core project goals. Our plans for 2022 include establishing WRAIR as one of our community's most trusted research institutes in clinical research and actively supporting the retention in the ongoing SpFN trial. We also plan to implement ongoing educational workshops, seminars, and conferences- both as stand-alone and in collaboration with community-based organizations (CBOs) to fulfill our commitment to building community capacity. Our outreach efforts will include developing train the trainer modules that stakeholders could use to educate their communities about clinical research. Finally, we plan to continue our work with the Science Education team to further assess educational materials on diversity and inclusion in COVID-19 research with local college student populations. These materials can be available as a resource for teachers or other community stakeholders interested in teaching about the importance of community engagement and diversity in clinical research.

We look forward to you being part of our future endeavors!

UPCOMING Educational Event

Program title: Diversity and inclusion in clinical Research
When: October 29, 2021 from 12:00-1:00pm
Guest Speaker: Sandhya Vasani, MD
Director, HJF component of MHRP and EIDB



Ask the Experts

Offers you the opportunity to ask questions about topics related to COVID vaccines and Clinical Research. Submit your question using the link below and our team will get back to you with a response.
[Submit your questions for "Ask the Experts"](#)



Thanks for Reading this issue!

Sincerely the CE Team,

Liza Dawson, Chief of Bioethics, Institutional Review Board Chair, and Research Integrity Officer
Beza Gebrehana, Community Engagement Lead Coordinator
Jael Kagai, Community Engagement Assistant
Jake Earl, Bioethicist
Kimberly Acosta, Community Outreach and Education Fellow