

**AWARD NUMBER:** W81XWH-17-1-0696

**TITLE:** Striving to Work and Overcoming Employment Barriers Among Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** John O'Neill, PhD

**CONTRACTING ORGANIZATION:** Kessler Foundation  
EAST HANOVER, NJ 07936-3147

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**14. ABSTRACT**

Spinal cord injury (SCI) is a sudden and debilitating injury that results in chronic paralysis, sensory and motor loss, impaired functioning, and drastically altered quality of life (QOL). The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the single largest SCI healthcare provider in the nation, offering a full range of rehabilitation care services to nearly 26,000 Veterans with SCI and SCI specialty care to about 13,000 of these Veterans. The Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems (SCIMS) treats an estimated 878 Veterans with SCI. Although the number of SCI/D cases is relatively small compared to many other chronic conditions, SCI/D is a complex condition with costs that are 6.5 times greater than the average Veteran receiving VA healthcare. Kessler Foundation with the University of New Hampshire conducted the 2015 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey (KFNEDES) to examine ways that people with disabilities seek and maintain employment. KFNEDES findings indicate that people with disabilities are striving to work and overcoming barriers to work. The goal of the current project is to extend the KFNEDES to Veterans with spinal cord injury (SCI) and further our understanding of the KFNEDES findings by exploring employment barrier experiences encountered by Veterans with SCI who are striving to work and the strategies used to overcome employment barriers.

Research is needed to guide care provided in VHA and SCIMS that improves functioning and reduces handicap, so Veterans can resume meaningful social participation in basic activities of life like employment. Specific Aims: Aim 1 (Phase 1). To examine the social validity of the 2015 KFNEDES survey questions and findings in a sample of Veterans with an SCI who are striving to work. Aim 2 (Phase 2). To understand the perceptions and experiences of Veterans with SCI who are striving to work while confronting employment barriers and finding strategies used to overcome these barriers. Aim 3 (Phase 3). To compare the employment barriers and strategies used among Veterans with an SCI who are striving to work with the 2015 KFNEDES nationally representative sample of persons with disabilities. Aim 4 (Phase 4). To develop consumer informed recommendations and actions-plans for evidenced-based VA employment intervention initiatives and civilian vocational rehabilitation programs serving Veterans with SCI. Study Design: We propose a three-year qualitative study that leverages the strength of the KFNEDES findings, focusing on Veterans from the SCIMS and the James A. Haley Veteran's Hospital, using focus groups, cognitive interviews, and semi-structured interviews. These three qualitative data collection methods will be implemented at both sites over four sequential phases of data collection. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews with Veterans will explore their perceptions and experiences with employment barriers and strategies used to overcome barriers. Then we will modify the KFNEDES for Veterans with SCI and conduct semi-structured interviews and Veterans version of the KFNEDES (KFNEDES-VS). Finally, we will integrate findings across methodologies to prepare employment service guidelines.

The information gathered from the proposed study will be used for programmatic development and to inform interventions that will address modifiable factors that impact SCI Veterans who are striving to work and overcoming employment barriers. Addressing employment barriers is paramount to quality of life for Veterans after an SCI. This proposal responds directly to the issues, barriers, and promoters of success for Veterans after an SCI that are specified in the FY16 Areas of Encouragement and SCIRP. Knowledge gained from the proposed work may be used to support the VA's 2016 Therapeutic and Supported Employment Services transformation plan which promotes "evidence-informed employment services and prioritizes community-based competitive employment" as a primary goal for Veterans with mental and/or physical impairments.

Of the more than 250,000 Americans with SCI, approximately 42,000 are Veterans. The factors that contribute to employment barriers are not well understood, particularly as it pertains to Veterans living with SCI. The proposed project will provide important information about Veterans with SCI who are striving to work and the strategies used to overcome employment barriers. These findings will also assist the VHA mission to provide specialized services to veterans with disabilities, hence, supporting the VA strategic objective (1.1) to improve Veteran wellness and economic security.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**

Spinal Cord Injury; Employment; Employment Barriers; Employment Facilitators; Striving to Work;

**16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:**

<b>a. REPORT</b>	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b>	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b>
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified

**17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**

Unclassified

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USAMRMC**19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER** (include area code)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

While it is well documented that persons with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI), including Veterans, experience multiple barriers while job seeking, the research has almost exclusively focused on the barriers or factors that hinder achieving employment goals rather than strategies that lead to employment. Kessler Foundation and University of New Hampshire recently conducted the population based 2015 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey (KFNEDS) to examine ways that people with disabilities seek and maintain employment. KFNEDS findings indicate that people with disabilities are striving to work and overcoming barriers to work. Since these results are reported across all disability conditions, how they translate to a population of Veterans with SCI is unknown. Few SCI employment studies have examined strategies used by Veterans with SCI to overcome employment barriers. The goal of this project is to extend the KFNEDS to Veterans with SCI and further the understanding of the KFNEDS findings by exploring employment barrier experiences encountered by Veterans with SCI who are striving to work and the strategies used to overcome employment barriers. This mixed-method study will bring together scientists from Kessler Foundation and James A. Haley Veterans Hospital to: 1) examine how Veterans with SCI strive to work and overcome employment barriers and 2) compare ways in which Veterans with SCI treated in the VHA and SCIMS strive to work and overcome employment barriers.

## 2. KEYWORDS

Spinal Cord Injury; Employment; Employment Barriers; Employment Facilitators; Striving to Work

## 3. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### a. What were the major goals of the project?

Please see *Table 1: Statement of Work 2018 - 2020*

### b. What was accomplished under these goals?

Please See *Table 1: Statement of Work: 2018 – 2020*

***Table 1: Statement of Work (SOW): 2018-2020***

	Timeline	Status of Completion	
		KF	JAH
<b>Aim 1</b> Examine the social validity of the 2015 KFNEDS questions and findings in a sample of Veterans with an SCI who are striving to work.			
<b>Major Task 2: Develop and pre-test KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions</b>			
Subtask 1: Recruit participants for focus groups		Completed	Completed
<i>Milestone Achieved: screened, recruited and enrolled 10 per focus group (1-2 focus group per site)</i>	04/01/2019		
Subtask 2: Conduct 1 focus group per site and analyze transcripts		Completed	Completed
<i>Milestone Achieved: focus groups conducted and data analyzed</i>	09/01/2019	Completed	Completed
Subtask 3: Prepare and pre-test KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions		Completed	Completed
KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions drafted		Completed	Completed
Subtask 4: Recruit participants for cognitive interviews		Pending	Pending
<i>Milestone Achieved: screened, recruited and enrolled 5 participants per site for cognitive interviews</i>	04/30/2019	Pending	Pending

<i>Milestone Achieved: Cognitive interview of the VS survey and semi-structured interview questions conducted and analyzed</i>	05/31/2019	Pending	Pending
Survey and semi-structured interview questions revised		Pending	Pending
CAB reviews results of focus groups and cognitive interviews		50% Complete	50% Complete
Final revisions made to KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview		Pending	Pending
<i>Milestone Achieved: KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview prepared and pre-tested</i>	06/30/2019	Pending	Pending
Present focus group and cognitive interview results at professional conference	09/30/2019	90% Complete	90% Complete
<b>Aim 2</b> Understand experiences of Veterans with SCI who are striving to work and overcoming barriers.			
<b>Major Task 3: Conduct KFNEDS-SCI survey &amp; semi-structured interviews</b>			
Subtask 1: Screen participants to assess striving status for KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview		Pending	Pending
<i>Milestone Achieved: screened, recruited and enrolled approximately 30 Veterans per site to complete the KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interviews</i>	07/30/2019	Pending	Pending
Subtask 2: Conduct KFNEDS-VS surveys and semi-structured interviews		Pending	Pending
<i>Milestone Achieved: 30 KFNEDS-VS surveys per site</i>	12/31/2019	Pending	Pending
<i>Milestone Achieved: 30 KFNEDS-VS semi-structured interviews per site</i>	12/31/2019	Pending	Pending
Subtask 3: Conduct qualitative analyses stratified on specific research questions to examine potential group differences in experiences, and strategies associated with overcoming employment barriers.		Pending	Pending
<i>Milestone Achieved: Qualitative analyses completed</i>	02/28/2020	Pending	Pending
Present results of qualitative analyses to CAB and professional conference		Pending	Pending
<i>Milestone Achieved: Dissemination of study findings at a professional conference</i>	09/30/2020	Pending	Pending

Amendments submitted during Year 2 to the IRB and USAMRMC HRPO for review:

KF:

1) Amendment application for Phase 2 materials was submitted to local IRB on 10/30/2019 and approved on 10/31/2019

2) The Continuing Review Checklist was submitted to HRPO on 10/02/2019 and approved on 10/23/2019.

JAH:

1) Amendment application for Phase 2 materials were submitted to local IRB on 10/29/2019 and approved on 11/20/2019.

2) The protocol was submitted for continuing review to local IRB on 12/26/2019 and approved on 01/06/2020.

3) Continuing Review Checklist (which also includes the amendment updates) was submitted to HRPO on 01/08/2020 and is pending approval.

**Table 1: Demographics of Focus Group Participants**

Mean Age	47.29 (± 11.75)	Education-Some College (%)	41%
Male (%)	88%	Income ≥\$1K (%)	28%
Non-Hispanic White (%)	65%	SSDI in Past Year (%)	71%
Mean Years Post Injury	16.35 yrs. (± 11.47)	Currently Employed (%)	65%
Paraplegia (%)	71%	Satisfied with Current Employment (%)	65%

**c. What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?**

To date, KF study team members have completed required TMS training modules required to obtain and/or maintain WOC status with JAH. No other opportunities for training have occurred during this reporting period.

**d. How were the results disseminated to communities of interest?**

Based on the findings from Phase 1, several presentations were prepared and accepted to professional conferences. To date, the research team has presented the findings at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Research Day at James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, and presentations were accepted to the 2019 Annual Conference for the American Congress of Rehabilitative Medicine (ACRM) and the 2019 HSR&D/QUERI National Conference "Innovation to Impact: Research to Advance VA's Learning Healthcare Community."

**e. What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?**

Please see the updated SOW included for review with this Annual Report (Appendix 2) for updated goals and targeted dates of completion. The study team plans to complete recruitment, data collection, and data analysis for Phase 2 – Cognitive Interviews; develop and finalize the data collection instruments and measures for use in Phase 3 – Semi-structured Interviews, and begin enrollment for Phase 3 – Semi-structured interviews.

#### 4. IMPACT

**a. What was the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?**

Nothing to report for this reporting period.

**b. What was the impact on other disciplines?**

Nothing to report for this reporting period.

**c. What was the impact of technology transfer?**

Nothing to report for this reporting period.

**d. What was the impact on society beyond science and technology?**

Nothing to report for this reporting period.

## 5. CHANGES/PROBLEMS

### a. Changes in approach and reasons for change

During this reporting period, the changes for Phase 1 – Focus groups (including updated materials for use with participants, update to inclusion/exclusion criteria, and updated protocol) were approved by the HRPO on 11/09/2018 (for Kessler) and on 02/24/2019 (for Tampa).

Focus groups were also completed at both study sites, completing 2 groups per site (all were completed by 04/01/2019). In total, 17 participants completed focus groups across both sites (n=9 at Kessler, n=8 at Tampa).

Data analysis has also been concluded for Phase 1. Outcomes from the qualitative data analysis include:

- Developing semi-structured interview questions:
  - o Based on focus groups findings the research team generated key content that will be included in the semi-structured interviews. For example, some Veterans who participated in the focus group responded differently to the demographic question “Are you employed?” in comparison to focus group to the question “What is current employment status?”. In order to understand why Veterans might respond differently to these questions, the research team decided to develop semi-structured interview questions to probe Veterans understanding of what it means to be “employed”: “What does being employed mean to you?”
- Dissemination:
  - o The following potential manuscript topics were generated from the focus group analyses:
    - “Dispelling the myth: Veterans with SCI proving their employers wrong”
    - “Cautionary tale: Employment is more than checking a box!”
    - “Perceptions of employment from the KFNEDS national civilian survey and Veteran survey”
  - o The following presentations have been accepted to professional conferences in 2019:
    - ACRM 2019 (poster presentation)  
*Striving to Work: Experiences of Veterans Living with a Spinal Cord Injury*
    - HSR&D 2019 (oral presentation)  
*Striving to Work: A Veteran-Centered Participatory Approach to Identify Strategies to Overcome Employment Barriers*

Materials to be used for Phase 2 have also been developed, pre-tested, and are being submitted for approval to local IRBs (Kessler and Tampa). These materials include the revised version of the KFNEDS – SCI Veteran Specific Question Set, the Cognitive Interview Script for the KFNEDS – SCI Veteran Specific Question Set, the Semi-Structured Interview questions, and the Cognitive Interview Script for the Semi-Structured Interview Questions.

### b. Actual or anticipated problems or delays and actions or plans to resolve them

As mentioned in the last quarterly report, there was a delay in recruiting, screening and enrolling focus group participants that caused delays in completing focus groups and analyzing the focus group results. These Phase 1 delays caused delays in achieving the targeted milestones this year related to developing materials, and recruiting, screening and enrolling participants for cognitive interviews. An updated SOW is included with this annual review which accounts for the delays.

Once the Phase 2 materials are approved, all milestones related to Phase 2 – Cognitive Interviews and Phase 3 – Semi-Structured Interviews should be met as according to the revised SOW (see Appendix 2).

This will be facilitated by several factors, including:

1. Only 10 participants (n=5 per site) are needed for cognitive interviews
2. All of the participants who completed the focus groups expressed interest and stated they would be willing to participate in Phase 2 - cognitive interviews



3. Scheduling conflicts will be limited because cognitive interviews are completed on an individual basis
4. Suggestions from the cognitive interviews regarding the finalized surveys and semi-structured interview questions will be incorporated quickly to finalize the materials for Phase 3.
5. Recruitment for Phase 3 will be occurring while Phase 2 is being completed.

**c. Changes that had a significant impact on expenditures**

To date, there have been no changes that have had a significant impact on expenditures.

**d. Significant changes in use or care of human subjects, vertebrate animals, biohazards, and/or select agents**

**i. Significant changes in use or care of human subjects**

There have been no significant changes in the use or care of human subjects during this reporting period.

**ii. Significant changes in use or care of vertebrate animals**

N/A – no animals are being used in this protocol

**iii. Significant changes in use of biohazards and/or select agents**

N/A – no biohazards are being used in this protocol

**6. PRODUCTS**

**a. Publications, conference papers, and presentations**

**i. Journal publications**

Nothing to report

**ii. Books or other non-periodical, one-time publications**

Nothing to report

**iii. Other publications, conference papers, and presentations**

1. Poster Presentation completed at James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital Annual Research Day

*Ottomanelli L, O'Neill J, Cotner B, Fyffe DC, Hathaway W, Ching D, Quinn A, White K. (2019). Striving to work: A veteran-centered participatory approach to identify strategies to overcome employment barriers. A poster presentation at the 2019 JAH Veterans' Hospital Research Day, Florida.*

2. Poster Presentation at ACRM 2019 (accepted)

*Fyffe, D., Cotner, B., Hathaway, W., Quinn, A., Ching, D., Ottomanelli, L., & O'Neill, J. (October, 2019) Striving to Work: Experiences of Veterans Living with a Spinal Cord Injury. The ACRM 96<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.*

3. Oral Presentation at HSR&D 2019 (accepted)

*Ottomanelli, L., O'Neill, J., Cotner, B., Fyffe, D., Hathaway, W., Ching, D., Quinn, A., & White, K. (October 31, 2019) Striving to Work: A Veteran-Centered Participatory Approach to Identify Strategies to Overcome Employment Barriers. Oral Presentation at the 2019 HSR&D/QUERI National Conference: Innovation to Impact: Research to Advance VA's Learning Healthcare Community, Washington, D.C.*

- b. Websites(s) or other Internet site(s)**  
Nothing to report
- c. Technologies or techniques**  
Nothing to report
- d. Inventions, patent applications, and/or licenses**  
Nothing to report
- e. Other products**  
Nothing to report.

## 7. PARTICIPANTS & OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

### a. What individuals have worked on the project?

<b>Name:</b>	John O'Neill, PhD
<b>Project Role:</b>	Principal Investigator (KF)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	N/A
<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	1.2
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Dr. O'Neill leads the project at KF and oversees all research related activities across both study sites. He leads bi-weekly study team meetings and CAB meetings. He initiates submissions to the IRB, HRPO, as well as the Quarterly and Annual reports. He has led the development of study related materials, including questionnaires, scripts, recruitment materials, and the procedural logistics, as well as data analysis. He has obtained WOC status at JAH, including completing all required TMS training modules.
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

<b>Name:</b>	Lisa Ottomanelli, PhD
<b>Project Role:</b>	Principal Investigator (JAH)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	0000-0003-0032-2969
<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	N/A
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Dr. Ottomanelli leads the study team at the Tampa Site overseeing submissions to the IRB, interactions with CAB and the development of study materials, including questionnaires, scripts, recruitment materials, and the procedural logistics. She has assisted in overseeing the analysis of data at the Tampa Site.
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

<b>Name:</b>	Denise Fyffe, PhD
<b>Project Role:</b>	Co-Investigator (KF)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	N/A
<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	1.68
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Dr. Fyffe has contributed to the development of study related materials, including questionnaires, scripts, recruitment materials, and the procedural logistics. Dr. Fyffe has also contributed to the analysis of Phase 1 data and development of interviews and materials for Phase 2. He has obtained WOC status at JAH, including completing all required TMS training modules.
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

<b>Name:</b>	Bridget Cotner, PhD
<b>Project Role:</b>	Co-investigator, Health Science Specialist, Anthropologist (JAH)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	0000-0001-9312-7294
<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	2.4
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Dr. Cotner has assisted with preparation for data collection including development of interview guides, recruitment materials and processes, and analysis. Dr. Cotner has also contributed to the analysis of Phase 1 data and development of interviews and materials for Phase 2.
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

<b>Name:</b>	Kevin White, MD
<b>Project Role:</b>	Co-Investigator (JAH)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	
<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	N/A
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Dr. White has developed the procedures for recruiting participants
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

<b>Name:</b>	Wendy Hathaway, MA
<b>Project Role:</b>	Qualitative Data Manager (JAH)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	0000-0002-6870-3808

<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	2.4
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Ms. Hathaway will assist in participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis.
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

<b>Name:</b>	Ashleigh Quinn
<b>Project Role:</b>	Research Coordinator (KF)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	N/A
<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	6
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Ms. Quinn coordinates the study at KF and assists Dr. O'Neill in ensuring study tasks are completed to standard and on time. She assists the PI and co-investigators with research tasks, assists with scheduling of study-related procedures, assists with preparations of IRB and HRPO submissions, as well as Reports to Sponsor, and assists with data collection and analysis as needed. She has maintained WOC status with JAH and has completed all necessary CITI and TMS training modules.
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

<b>Name:</b>	Deveney Ching
<b>Project Role:</b>	Research Coordinator (JAH)
<b>Research Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):</b>	<a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1578-6021">0000-0002-1578-6021</a>
<b>Nearest person month worked:</b>	2.4
<b>Contribution to Project:</b>	Ms. Ching works with Kessler Foundation Research Coordinator to ensure flow between sites, assists the PI and co-investigators with research tasks, assists with scheduling of study-related procedures, assists with preparations of IRB and HPRO submissions, and assists with data collection and analysis as needed.
<b>Funding Support:</b>	N/A

**b. Has there been a change in the active other support of the PD/PI(s) or senior/key personnel since the last reporting period?**

There have been no changes in the active other support of any key personnel since the last reporting period.

**c. What other organizations were involved as partners?**

<b>Organization Name:</b>	James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital
<b>Location of Organization:</b>	13000 Bruce B. Downs Boulevard Tampa, FL 33612
<b>Partner's contribution to the project:</b>  <i>(check all that apply)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Financial support</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>In-kind support</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Facilities</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Collaboration</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Personnel exchanges</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other (please describe):</b> N/A

## 8. SPECIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

### a. COLLABORATING AWARDS

N/A

### b. QUAD CHARTS

See Appendix 1

## 9. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Quad Chart

Appendix 2: Updated SOW

Appendix 3: Professional Presentations

- Poster Presentation completed at James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital Annual Research Day
- Poster Presentation at ACRM 2019
- Oral Presentation at HSR&D 2019 (accepted)

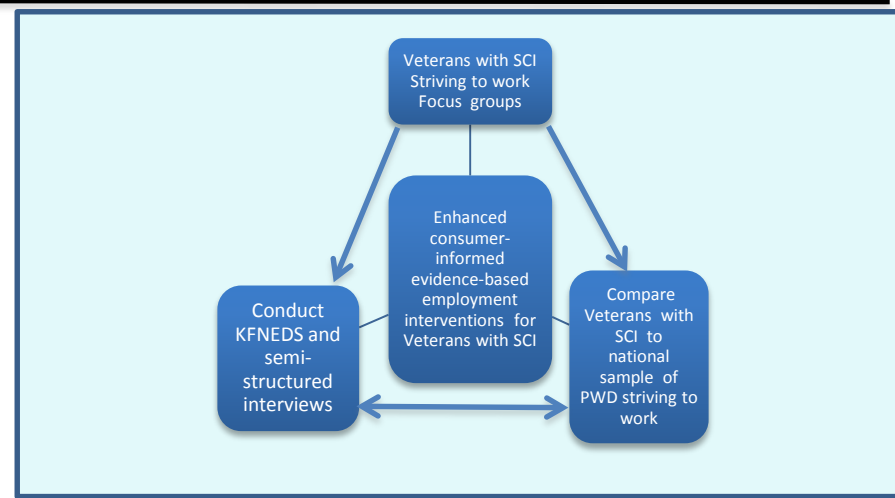
# Appendix 1: QUAD Chard



**Study/Product Aim(s)**

- Aim 1** Examine the social validity of the 2015 KFNEDS questions and findings in a sample of Veterans with an SCI who are striving to work.
- Aim 2** Understand experiences of Veterans with SCI who are striving to work and overcoming barriers.
- Aim 3** To compare employment barriers and strategies used to overcome barriers among Veterans with an SCI with 2015 KFNEDS nationally representative sample of persons.
- Aim 4** Develop consumer informed actions-plans for evidenced-based VA employment intervention and civilian vocational rehabilitation programs serving Veterans with SCI.

A qualitative study using focus groups, cognitive interviews and semi-structured interviews will be conducted at 2 sites over four sequential phases of data collection. Results from each phase will be analyzed separately and merged to inform subsequent phases and the development of employment recommendations for dissemination.



Accomplishments: Cognitive interviews of KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions prepared and pre-tested

**Timeline and Cost**

Activities	CY	17	18	19	20
Launch study & examine social validity of 2015 KFNEDS for Veterans with an SCI		[Green bar from start to mid-18, Purple bar from mid-18 to end-18]			
Understand how Veterans with SCI are striving to work			[Green bar from start to mid-19, Purple bar from mid-19 to end-19]		
Compare striving to work among Veterans with SCI to a national sample of people with disabilities				[Green bar from start to mid-20, Purple bar from mid-20 to end-20]	
Develop consumer-informed evidence-based employment interventions					[Green bar from start to end-20]
<b>Estimated Budget (\$K)</b>		\$52,694	\$209,164	\$211,681	\$165,418

**Goals/Milestones**

- CY17 Major Task 1: Preparing to launch study**
- ✓ Obtain Local IRB approval at Kessler ✓✓✓
  - ✓ Obtain local IRB approval at Tampa VA
  - ✓ Obtain HRPO approval for all protocols
- CY18 Major Task 2: Develop and pre-test KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions**
- ✓ Two focus groups conducted and data analyzed
  - Cognitive interviews of the KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions conducted and analyzed
  - KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview prepared and pre-tested
- CY19 Major Task 3: Conduct KFNEDS-SCI survey & semi-structured interviews**
- Conduct KFNEDS-VS surveys and semi-structured interviews
  - Complete quantitative and qualitative analyses KFNEDS-VS surveys and semi structured interviews
  - Disseminate study findings at professional conferences
- CY20 Major Task 4: Conduct comparative analyses of open-ended responses, Veterans with SCI versus 2015 KFNEDS participants**
- Qualitative comparative analyses completed and results disseminated
- CY20 Major Task 5: Employment program guideline development & dissemination**
- Practice & Policy Recommendations generated from study findings
- Budget Expenditure to Date**  
 Projected Expenditure: \$277,203  
 Actual Expenditure: \$276,603

# Appendix 2: Statement of Work



**STATEMENT OF WORK**  
**(Revised with One Year NCE)**  
**START DATE October 1, 2017**

Site 1:	Kessler Foundation (KF)	Site 2:	James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital (JAH)
	120 Eagle Rock Avenue, Suite 100		8900 Grand Oak Circle (151R)
	East Hanover, NJ 07936		Tamp, FL 33637-1022
	PI: John O'Neill, PhD (JO)		PI: Lisa Ottomanelli, PhD (LO)

	Timeline	Research Sites	
		KF	JAH
<b>Aim 1: Examine the social validity of the 2015 KFNEDS questions and findings in a sample of Veterans with an SCI who are striving to work.</b>			
<b>Major Task 1: Preparing to launch study</b>			
Subtask 1: Obtain IRB approval			
Hold research team and CAB planning meeting		JO	LO
Finalize consent form, human subject protocol and submit KF and Tampa IRB protocols		JO	LO
Coordinate with Sites for Military 2nd level IRB review (ORP/HRPO)		JO	LO
Submit amendments, adverse events and protocol deviations as needed		JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Local IRB approval at Kessler and Tampa VA</i>	12/31/2017	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: HRPO approval for all protocols</i>	03/31/2018	JO	LO
<b>Major Task 2: Develop and pre-test KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions</b>			
Subtask 1: Recruit participants for focus groups			
<i>Milestone Achieved: screened, recruited and enrolled 10 per focus group (1-2 focus group per site)</i>	12/31/2018	JO	LO
Subtask 2: Conduct 1 focus group per site and analyze transcripts			
<i>Milestone Achieved: focus groups conducted</i>	04/01/2019	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: focus group data analyzed</i>	09/29/2019	JO	LO
Present focus group results at professional conference(s)	11/08/2019	JO	LO

<b>Subtask 3: Prepare and pre-test KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions</b>			
KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions drafted by study team	09/01/2019	JO	LO
Pre-test KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions with CAB members	09/15/2019	JO	LO
Finalize KFNEDS-VS and semi-structured interview questions for cognitive testing	10/22/2019	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: KFNEDS-VS and semi-structured interview questions approved by IRBs + HRPO for cognitive testing (Ph2)</i>	11/01/2019	JO	LO
<b>Subtask 4: Recruit participants and complete cognitive interviews</b>			
Screen, recruit, and enroll 5 participants per site for cognitive interviews	12/31/2019	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Cognitive interview of the VS survey and semi-structured interview questions conducted</i>	12/31/2019	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Cognitive interview of the VS survey and semi-structured interview questions analyzed</i>	01/31/2020	JO	LO
CAB reviews results of focus groups and cognitive interviews	01/31/2020	JO	LO
<b>Subtask 5: Update/revise KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview questions (for Phase 3)</b>			
Study team update and revise KFNEDS-SCI survey and semi-structured interview questions	02/15/2020	JO	LO
CAB review and pre-test Phase 3 materials/protocol (questionnaires, KFNEDS-SCI survey, and semi-structured interview questions)	02/28/2020	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Phase 3 materials approved by IRBs + HRPO</i>	03/31/2020	JO	LO
Present cognitive interview results at professional conference(s)	TBD	JO	LO
<b>Aim 2: Understand experiences of Veterans with SCI who are striving to work and overcoming barriers.</b>			
<b>Major Task 3: Conduct KFNEDS-SCI survey &amp; semi-structured interviews</b>			
<b>Subtask 1: Identify and screen participants to assess striving status for KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interview</b>			
<i>Milestone Achieved: identified and screened approximately 30 Veterans per site to complete the KFNEDS-VS survey and semi-structured interviews</i>	06/01/2020	JO	LO
<b>Subtask 2: Conduct KFNEDS-VS surveys and semi-structured interviews</b>			
<i>Milestone Achieved: 30 KFNEDS-VS surveys and semi-structured interviewed conducted (at each site)</i>	06/30/2020	JO	LO
<b>Subtask 3: Conduct qualitative analyses stratified on specific research questions to examine potential group differences in experiences, and strategies associated with overcoming employment barriers.</b>			
<i>Milestone Achieved: Qualitative analyses completed</i>	9/30/2020	JO	LO
CAB reviews results of qualitative analyses and proposal of professional presentations	TBD	JO	LO
Present results of qualitative analyses at professional conference(s)	TBD	JO	LO

**Aim 3: To compare employment barriers and strategies used to overcome barriers among Veterans with an SCI with 2015 KFNEDS nationally representative sample of persons.**

**Major Task 4: Comparative Analyses**

Subtask1: Conduct qualitative comparative analyses of open-ended responses of Veterans with SCI who completed the KFNEDS–VS with a sub-sample of the 2015 KFNEDS participants			
<i>Milestone Achieved: qualitative comparative analyses completed</i>	10/31/2020	JO	LO
Subtask 2: Present results of comparative analyses			
CAB reviews results of comparative analyses and proposed dissemination plan	11/15/2020	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Qualitative comparative analyses results disseminated</i>	12/30/2020	JO	LO

**Aim 4: Develop consumer informed actions-plans for evidenced-based VA employment intervention and civilian vocational rehabilitation programs serving Veterans with SC**

**Major Task 5: Employment Program Guideline Development and Dissemination**

Subtask 1: Triangulate qualitative and quantitative data from all of the study phases			
<i>Milestone Achieved: Triangulation analyses completed; most frequently cited barriers identified, best strategies identified, etc.</i>	12/30/2020	JO	LO
Subtask 2: Conduct 1 follow-up focus group per site with 8 participants per site to evaluate most frequently cited employment barriers and strategies to overcome barriers for Veterans with an SCI.			
Study team develops and finalizes materials for follow-up focus group	12/30/2020	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: follow-up focus group materials approved by IRBs + HRPO</i>	01/15/2020	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Follow-up focus group conducted with approximately 8 previous participants from each site</i>	01/31/2021	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Follow-up focus groups data analyzed</i>	02/28/2021	JO	LO
Subtask 3: Develop consumer informed action-plans [with CAB]			
CAB reviews results of follow-up focus group data and begins development of action plan with study team	03/30/2021	JO	LO
Study team drafts action plans and practice and policy recommendations	04/30/2021	JO	LO
CAB and study team review, revise, and finalize action plans, practice recommendations and policy recommendations	05/15/2021	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: Practice &amp; Policy Recommendations generated from study findings</i>	06/30/2021	JO	LO

Subtask 4: Disseminate findings at national professional meetings (e.g., abstracts, presentation, publications) [CAB & Study Team]			
CAB and study team review meeting to plan for dissemination of study findings and submission of policy recommendations to selected agencies	07/2021 – 09/2021	JO	LO
<i>Milestone Achieved: results, policies, recommendations, submitted for presentations for following years (TBD)</i>	07/2021 – 09/2021	JO	LO

	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				NCE			
Target Enrollment (per quarter)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Kessler Foundation					10				5		15	15	8			
Tampa VA					10				5		15	15	8			
<b>Target Enrollment (cumulative)</b>					<b>20</b>				<b>30</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>106</b>			

# Appendix 3:

## Professional Presentations

# Engaging Veterans at the beginning of the research process helps shape action plan to improve employment services.

## Striving to Work: A Veteran-Centered Participatory Approach to Identify Strategies to Overcome Employment Barriers

Lisa Ottomaneli, PhD, John O'Neill, PhD, Bridget Cotner, PhD, Denise Fyffe, PhD, Wendy Hathaway, MA, Deveney Ching, MA, Ashleigh Quinn, BS, and Kevin White, MD



### INTRODUCTION

- Utilizes a Veteran-Centered approach to understand the workplace experience from the perspective of individuals with disabilities
- Examines how Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) strive to work and overcome employment barriers.
- Aim is to develop consumer informed action plans for employment interventions to guide current VA system-wide and community initiatives to enhance employment services.

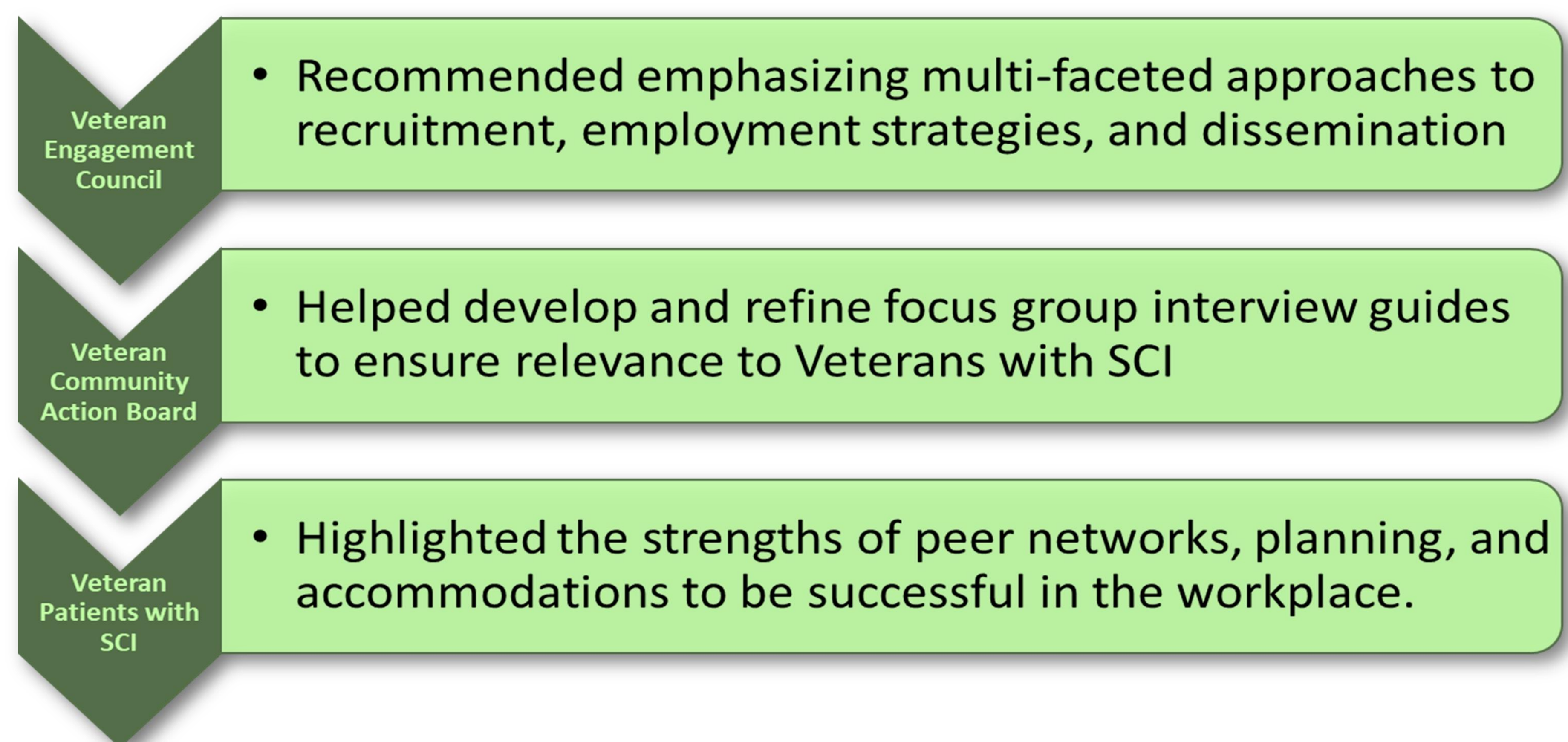
### METHODS

- Discussions with standing Veteran Engagement Council (VEC) on employment strategies, study recruitment, and dissemination plans.
- Convening a Community Action Board (CAB) of Veterans with SCI to develop and refine group structured interviews guides
- Conducting focus groups of Veterans with SCI to discuss employment barriers and strategies for overcoming them.

### IMPACT

- This poster illustrates the impact of early involvement of Veterans in shaping research (Phase I of this study).
- Active Veteran participation will continue through all 4 study phases to enhance relevance of findings.
- Including Veterans at a VA SCI Center (JAHVA) and a Model System (Kessler) broadens the perspective and generalizability of findings.

### VETERAN-CENTERED PARTICIPATORY APPROACH



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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# Striving to Work: Experiences of Veterans Living with a Spinal Cord Injury

Denise C. Fyffe, PhD<sup>[1,2]</sup>, Bridget A. Cotner, PhD<sup>[3,4]</sup>, Wendy Hathaway, MA<sup>[3]</sup>, Ashleigh Quinn, BS<sup>[1]</sup>; Deveney Ching, MA<sup>[3]</sup>; Lisa Ottomanelli, PhD<sup>[3,5]</sup>; John O'Neill, PhD<sup>[1,2]</sup>

[1] Kessler Foundation, [2] New Jersey Medical School Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey [3] James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital [4] Department of Anthropology, University of South Florida [5] Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program, Department of Child and Family Studies, College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, University of South Florida

## Introduction

- Spinal cord injury (SCI) is a sudden and debilitating injury that results in chronic paralysis, sensory and motor loss, impaired functioning and drastically altered quality of life.
- Finding and maintaining employment is one of the most difficult economic challenges reported by persons living with an SCI.
- The purpose of this collaborative project is to examine the employment barriers encountered by Veterans living with SCI and strategies to overcome these employment barriers.

## Methods

**Design:** A cross-sectional qualitative study.  
**Setting:** 2 sites; James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital and Kessler Foundation.  
**Participants:** Veterans with a SCI (n=17) who are striving to work. Striving to work is defined as being actively engaged in job preparation, search, and/or employed since the onset of their injury.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics**

Mean Age	47.29 ± 11.75	Education: Part College (%)	41%
Male (%)	88%	Income: \$100,000 Or Over	28%
Non-Hispanic White (%)	65%	SSDI Received in the Past 2 Years (%)	71%
Mean Years Post-Injury	16.35 ± 11.47	Currently Employed (%)	65%
Paraplegia (%)	71%	Satisfied with Current Employment Status (%)	65%

**Analyses:** Focus group data were coded using inductive and deductive coding schemes. Coded text was compiled into a rapid analysis matrix. Comparisons were made to identify similarities in barriers and facilitators experienced among Veterans living with an SCI who were striving to work.



## Veterans living with SCI experience barriers to seeking employment and while at work.

## Networking, family support, job preparation, and management of SCI secondary conditions are strategies used to seek and maintain employment

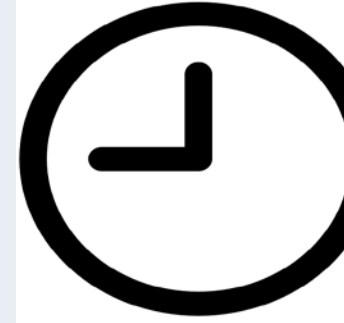



## Results

**Table 1a. Barriers and Facilitators Looking for Work**

Theme	Barriers	Strategies
 Education/ Training	Lack of education/training	Seeking education to prepare for employment
 Learning to live with an SCI	Unfamiliarity with secondary complications	Learning to manage secondary complications

**Table 1b. Barriers and Facilitators At Work**

Theme	Barriers	Strategies
 Time	Increased amount of time it takes to get ready for work	Preparing to overcome potential barriers
 Perceptions of others	Negative perceptions of co-workers and supervisors	Supportive co-workers and supervisors

## Discussion

- Similar barriers related to SCI characteristics and negative attitudes of colleagues within the workplace were experienced among Veterans living with an SCI who striving to work.
- Participants' expressed similar strategies used to overcome employment barriers.
- Better understanding of these barriers and strategies can inform employment programs and promote labor force participation for this underserved population.

## Acknowledgements and Disclosures

- Financial Disclosures: None.
- This work was supported by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs through the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program under Award No. W81XWH-17-1-0696.
- The views, opinions, and/or findings contained in this article are those of the authors and should not be construed as an official position by the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, or any other federal agency, policy, or decision unless so designated by other official documentation.
- This research was also supported by Kessler Foundation and the Northern New Jersey Spinal Cord Injury System [Grant # 90SI5026] from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), Agency for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Dyson-Hudson; Kirshblum).
- This material is the result of work supported with resources and the use of facilities at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital.



# Striving to Work

A Veteran-Centered Participatory Approach to Identify Strategies to Overcome Employment Barriers

**Lisa Ottomanelli, PhD**, Research and Development Service, James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital;  
**John O'Neill, PhD**, Disability and Employment Research, Kessler Foundation;  
**Bridget Cotner, PhD**, Research and Development Service, James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital;  
**Denise Fyffe, PhD**, Center for Spinal Cord Injury Research, Kessler Foundation;  
**Wendy Hathaway, MA**, Research and Development Service, James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital;  
**Deveney Ching, MA**, Research and Development Service, James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital;  
**Ashley Quinn, BS**, Center for Spinal Cord Injury Research, Kessler Foundation;  
**Kevin White, MD**, James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital



Presentation for 2019 HSR&D/QUERI National Conference,  
“Innovation to Impact: Research to Advance VA’s Learning Health Care Community”  
October 31, 2019, Washington, D.C.



# Background

- Three-year Qualitative Research Award from the Department of Defense, Spinal Cord Injury Research Program
- Extends the findings of the 2015 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey (KFNEDS) to veterans with SCI
- Compares the ways in which veterans with SCI treated in the Spinal Cord Injury Model System and the Veterans Health Administration strive to work and overcome employment barriers





# Study Objective

To utilize a **Veteran-centered** approach to understand the workplace experience from the perspective of individuals with disabilities and examine how Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) strive to work and overcome employment barriers.



# Veteran Engagement Strategies

- James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital - Veterans Engagement Group (VEG)
  - Supports Veteran informed research proposals and studies
  - Veterans who received rehabilitation care at the VA & their family members or caregivers
  - Monthly meetings with investigators and research staff
  - Encourages patient-centered research
  - 1 year term
  - Donated time
- Striving to Work Study - Community Action Board (CAB)
  - Specifically for this study
  - Veterans with SCI
  - Up to 3 meetings a year
  - Reviews study processes and documents
  - Assists in developing new products
  - \$500 honorarium per year





## Discussing

Discussing Veteran Engagement Group (VEG) proposal, employment strategies, study recruitment, and dissemination plans.



## Convening

Convening a community action board (CAB) of veterans with SCI to develop and refine focus group structured interview guides.



## Conducting

Conducting focus groups of veterans with SCI to discuss employment barriers and strategies for overcoming them.

# Methods

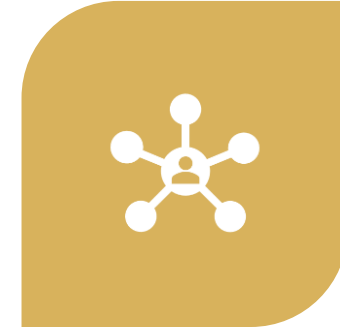




The VEG recommended emphasizing multi-faceted approaches to recruitment, employment strategies, and dissemination.



The CAB helped develop and refine focus group interview guides to ensure relevance to veterans with SCI.



Focus groups highlighted the strengths of peer networks, planning, and accommodations to be successful in workplace.

# Results





Engages active participation of Veterans, which continues throughout the study.



Enhances the relevance of study measures for Veterans with SCI and the validity of the project procedures and outcomes.



Informs existing and emerging employment services and facilitates the delivery of personalized, pro-active and patient-driven health care based on Veteran preferences.

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# Impacts





Financial Disclosures: None.

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