

Atlanta VAMC  
Rehabilitation Research & Development Center News  
Center of Excellence in Aging Veterans with Vision Loss



Winter 2010

## Helping Veterans "Age in Place"

Dr. Patricia Griffiths, a research scientist at the Atlanta VA Medical Center, is aiming to help aging veterans stay where they want to be: ***in their own home***. Griffiths is heading up a couple of research projects designed to reach this goal. The first, known as the **Caregiver Skills Project**, is studying ways to help those who take care of aging veterans - particularly veterans with physical disabilities. "The VA realizes that it is vital to support the caregiver, so the caregiver can support the vet," says Griffiths. She notes that there are over 65 million unpaid, informal caregivers in the United States. Caregivers assist in basic activities of daily life such as bathing, dressing, feeding, getting to and from the doctor and keeping up with medications. "If we can help *these* people we have a better chance of keeping the vets out of institutions and at home – allowing them to age in place."

Dr. Griffiths' other project, **Sleep Evaluation & Enhancement Psycho-Educational intervention for**



Acti-watch  
sleep monitoring devices

**Dyads or SLEEP-E Dyads**, is studying how the nighttime slumber patterns of couples (or "dyads") effect their daily life. "Poor sleep is related to a host of adverse outcomes such as daytime drowsiness, irritability, depression, falls, accidents, medication errors and attention difficulties...it is particularly hard for caregivers who have such a physically and emotionally demanding job to manage all they must without the benefit of a good night's sleep." Griffiths says past studies have focused only on the veteran. "This project is designed to take a look at how both partner's sleep. We're monitoring who wakes up first,

the quality of each person's sleep and the nature and source of any sleep disturbances during the night." Those who volunteer for this study will wear a sleep monitoring device called an acti-watch on their wrist. Participants will also keep a daily diary of how they slept along with descriptions of their moods and behavior. Griffiths explains that the information will help her research team identify problems and tailor specific solutions for each couple designed to improve sleep and daytime functioning in both the veteran and their caregiver.

A key component of both projects is that research staff and caregiving couples are encouraged to have a good time together – according to Griffiths "research integrity and fun are NOT mutually exclusive propositions!"

### About the Researcher...

Dr. Patricia C. Griffiths is a Gerontologist and Health Research Scientist at the Atlanta VA Medical Center's Rehabilitation Research and Development Center of Excellence. She earned her B.S. in Psychology summa cum laude from Trinity College of Vermont followed by a M.S. and Ph.D. in Life-Span Developmental Psychology from Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Griffiths' research focuses on improving quality-of-life for veterans and their caregivers. She is particularly interested in ways the VA can help promote 'aging in place' which will prevent or delay institutionalization of veterans. In addition to her research, Dr. Griffiths also teaches aging sensitivity classes in the VA new employee orientation sessions and serves on national committees devoted to supporting caregivers of veterans and enhancing effective communication skills with persons with dementia.



Dr. Patricia Griffiths

*Do you care for a veteran?*



## *The Caregiving Skills Research Study*

**Is looking for caregivers providing care to a veteran who is:**  
**>65 years of age and needs assistance with transfers or positional change.**

If eligible, you will be asked to participate in a phone interview followed by 2 complementary in-home assessments to determine your caregiving needs.

**404-321-6111 x 7093**

*The Principal Investigator for this study is  
Patricia C. Griffiths, Ph.D. at the VA Medical Center.  
For more information, please call our project office.  
Please leave a message if necessary*

*IRB approved 12-1-09*



### **In Memoriam...**

Bettye Rose Connell, Ph.D., died on September 13 at Crawford Long Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Connell was a Health Research Scientist at the Atlanta VA Medical Center, Director of Research for the Geriatrics Research, Education and Clinical Center and Assistant Professor of Medicine in Geriatrics and Gerontology at Emory University.

A native of Warren County Georgia, Dr. Connell was born on May 27, 1949. She was the daughter of the late Hall Wallace Connell and Janet Paschall Connell of Warrenton.

Dr. Connell was a graduate of John Graham High School in Warrenton and received her undergraduate degree from UNC-Greensboro. She obtained a master's degree from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and a Ph.D. from Georgia Institute of Technology.

Her career interests focused on the effects of the physical and social environments on the lives of the frail and the elderly. She had a great affection for the underrepresented and spent her life advocating for them. Her endless commitment and effort to improve the lives of the elderly and their caregivers was hugely successful and carries on through her many publications, research findings, and in those mentored by her.

Bettye Rose was respected and loved by many. Bettye Rose was a lifelong member of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Warrenton. She was a passionate gardener and a devoted cat lover.