RESEARCH STATEMENT
My overall research goal is to use a variety of therapeutic approaches and technology to improve function and independence in older adults and individuals with disabilities. From a content perspective, I investigate mobility decline in older adults and consequences of restricted mobility including falls, activity avoidance and reduced participation. I employ a holistic approach that considers personal, social, cultural and environmental factors that impact individuals with restricted mobility. I utilize modern measurement techniques to develop and/or modify outcome measures related to my area of interest. I use advanced technologies to improve access to rehabilitation and provide care in the home environment.

EDUCATION:


WORK EXPERIENCE:
Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Rural Health (ORH). Veterans Rural Health Resource Center- Gainesville (VRHRC-GNV); Acting Co-Director.
Department of Veterans Affairs, Gainesville, FL. October 2019.
Responsibilities: Provide direction and vision for VRHRC-GNV, increase research capacity, maximize resources, build strong mentorship, facilitate collaborations with VA/non-VA partners, and pursue excellence in research, innovation and dissemination in the areas of independent living and workforce development.

Department of Veterans Affairs, Center of Innovation on Disability and Rehabilitation Research – (CINDRR) – Assistant Director, Research Health Scientist, and Co-leader Mentoring Core.
Responsibilities: Develop a strong research program in the area of rehabilitation and outcomes research relevant to Veterans with disabilities. Duties include leading research studies as Principal Investigator, supervise and manage research team, collaborate with other VA researchers as co-Investigator, publish study results in peer-reviewed journals, and present study findings at local, national, and/or international conferences. Administrative responsibilities include supervising CINDRR administration and operations activities. Mentorship activities include weekly meetings with mentees, recruitment of candidates, development of mentoring plan, evaluation of mentees and reporting center wide mentorship activities and productivity.

University of Florida, Department of Occupational Therapy - Adjunct Research Assistant Professor.
Responsibilities: Develop a strong research program in the area of rehabilitation and outcomes research relevant to individuals with disabilities. Duties include leading research studies as Principal Investigator, supervise and manage research team, collaborate with other researchers
as co-Investigator, publish study results in peer-reviewed journals, and present study findings at local, national, and/or international conferences. Teaching responsibilities include Master and Doctoral level courses in research methods, measurement and rehabilitation science. Mentoring includes undergraduate honors, master, doctoral and post-doctoral students.

**Department of Veterans Affairs, Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center – Pre-Doctoral Associated Health Rehabilitation Research Fellowship.**  
Responsibilities: Complete research project in the areas of veteran-centered outcomes in the rehabilitation of gait disorders and detection of minimally significant changes in the same population.

**Department of Veterans Affairs, Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center - Health Scientist / Education Specialist.**  
Responsibilities: Develop culturally sensitive educational materials for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Participate in the evaluation of veterans interviews to assess specific needs of this population. Develop a literature/references database for issues related to Veterans’ readjustment after deployment. Assist in data collection and development of data extraction procedures to investigate the implementation of a dysphasia screening tool for veterans who have suffered a stroke.

**University of Florida, College of Health Professions – Research assistant/Data manager.**  

**University of Florida, College of Health Professions – Charlotte Liberty Scholar.**  
Responsibilities: Assigned to Gait and Balance Clinic at the Gainesville VA/GRECC. Design and development of a clinical database for patients participating in clinic. Data entry, management, and analysis.

**HONORS**  
2001 Charlotte Liberty Doctoral Scholar award (2 years).  
2007 VA Pre-Doctoral Associated Health Rehabilitation Research Fellowship Award.

**CURRENT EXTERNAL SUPPORT**  
VA Office of Rural Health  
Oct. 2019

**Veterans Rural Health Resource Center Gainesville (VRHRC-GNV)**  
The VRHRC-GNV will serve as a field-based satellite office to research, innovate, and disseminate rural health care.  
Role: Acting Co-Director  
Annual budget (FY20): $3,806,269

**Rural Veterans Tele-Rehabilitation Initiative Program Evaluation (RVTRI)**  
RVTRI utilizes telehealth technology to deliver physical, occupational, and recreational therapies directly to rural patients in their homes through real-time, two-way video. This
evaluation investigates barriers and facilitators to implementing this VHA system-wide Tele-Rehabilitation program for rural Veterans.
Role: Project lead
Annual Direct Costs: $100,000

VA HSR&D 1 I50 HX001233-01 2009-2019
**Center of Innovation on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (CINDRR)**
CINDRR is dedicated to conducting research that identifies, develops, and tests strategies for improving Veteran rehabilitation services across the continuum of care and providing long term support for Veterans with disabilities and their families, including issues related to access, utilization, cost, quality, and health outcomes.
Role: Assistant Director, Senior Investigator.
Annual Direct Costs: $750,000

VA PM&R National Program Office 2017-2022
**Tele-Rehabilitation Enterprise Wide Initiative Evaluation**
The Office of Rural Health has awarded the Tele-Rehabilitation Enterprise Wide Initiative (TREWI) to the VACO PM&R National Program Office. This evaluation investigates barriers and facilitators to implementing a VHA system-wide Tele-Rehabilitation program for rural Veterans.
Role: Project lead
Annual Direct Costs: $200,000

National Institute on Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research 2014-2020
**Postdoctoral Disability Policy Research Training Program**
In partnership with the VA Center of Innovation on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, this post-doctoral fellowship program will train six postdoctoral fellows to conduct high-quality multidisciplinary disability policy research in the area of community living and participation for Veterans with disabilities.
Role: Principal Investigator
Annual Direct Costs: $150,000

VA Office of Rural Health, Enterprise-Wide Initiative 2018-2019
**VHA Rural Needs Assessment**
This project gathers VISN and VAMC perspectives to better understand rural Veteran health care access needs and help in determining future ORH program offerings.
Role: Co-Principal Investigator
Annual Direct Cost: $112,000

IIR 15-117 Merit (Freytes) 2017-2021
**VA HSR&D**
**Spanish Online & Telephone Intervention for Caregivers of Veterans with Stroke**
This project evaluates a telephone and online problem-solving intervention combined with the nationally available Spanish-language, evidence-based RESCUE website to reduce stroke caregiver depression, improve the recovery of Veterans post-stroke, enable Veterans to remain in their homes, and reduce healthcare costs.
Role: Co-Investigator
Annual Direct Cost: $210,000


**PRESENTATIONS:**


Ramroop, M, Romero S, Prather, E, Slaibe, E, Winkler, SL. *User testing of SPOOCI: an innovative power wheelchair control device.* AOTA Annual Conference, April 2015.


COMMITTEES
Rehabilitation Science Steering Committee, 2014 – Present time
NIH K-12 Executive Committee, 2014 – Present time
VA Scientific Projects Committee, 2014 – 2017
Public Health and Health Promotions Research Committee, 2014 – 2016
UF IRB-01 Review Board member, 2017- 2019
VA Research and Development board, 2017- Present time

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Florida, department of Occupational Therapy, Rehabilitation Science Doctoral program, Fall 2012-Present time. Class: Rehabilitation Science Theory and Application.


MENTORING
Co-leader, Mentorship Core, Center of Innovation on Disability and Rehabilitation Research – (CINDRR). Provide mentoring for Junior Investigators, Post-Doctoral fellows and pre-doctoral students.

Fellows, and Pre-Doctoral students.
Gail Castaneda, PhD, Post-Doctoral Fellow (Program Director)
Luz Mairena Semeah, Ph.D, MPA, Post-Doctoral Fellow (Program Director)
Leslie Santos Roman, Ph.D, Post-Doctoral Fellow (Program Director)
Pallavi Sod, Doctoral graduate student (Doctoral Committee Chair)
Mi Jun Lee, Doctoral graduate student (Doctoral Committee Chair)
Stephanie Faocompre, Honor Student. Thesis title: Validation of Balance Measures Used to Assess Patients with Parkinson’s Disease.

LANGUAGES:
Fluent in Spanish. Experience in translating educational materials in the areas of health, human development, nutrition and exercise.

ACCREDITATIONS AND CERTIFICATIONS:
Certified Athletic Trainer.

COMPLETED EXTERNAL SUPPORT
Associated Health Rehabilitation Research award. Romero (PI) 2007 –2008
Department of Veterans Affairs, Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center.
Veteran-centered outcomes in the rehabilitation of gait disorders and detection of minimally significant changes in the same population.
Role: Principal Investigator

RORC Pilot Award, Romero (PI) 2010-2011
Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center Pilot award program
Development of a Gait and Balance Research Database
The purpose of this grant is to develop a research database that will support a number studies in the areas of falls assessment and rehabilitation, distance physical therapy delivery, clinical and laboratory correlates of mobility impairment, and other research activities related to geriatric gait and balance rehabilitation.
Role: Principal Investigator
NIH/ NIA Romero (PI Sub-award) 2010-2011
2R44AG031605-02
Wheelchair with drop down armrest for sliding transfers by user.
This project produces several versions of the “SAFESLIDEBOARD,” a wheelchair with an integral transfer board/armrest combination, that are more easily positioned, stronger, more stable during transfers, and commercially viable. Eight hypotheses will be tested and structured interviews conducted to measure the effectiveness of SAFESLIDEBOARD from wheelchair user and caregiver perspectives
Role: Principal Investigator (Sub-award)

1R21HD053526-01A2 Romero PI (Sub-award) 2010–2013
National Institute of Health
SPOOCI: Self-Referenced Personal Omni-Purpose Orthotic Control Interface.
The major goals of this project are to develop and test an innovative power wheelchair controller that removes the controller from the wheelchair so that it can be worn by the user.
Role: Site- PI Annual Direct Costs: $275,000
Person months per year: 2.4

VA Rural Health Information Exchange Pilot Program Romero (Site PI) 2013-2015
Veteran Initiated Coordination Trial of Rural Health Information Exchange VICTOR-HIE
The My HealtheVet Program Office and the VA Office of Rural Health (ORH) are collaborating in this project to pilot use of My HealtheVet to help Veterans communicate with their non-VA providers about their VA care.
Annual Direct Costs: $104,000
Person months per year: 2.4

Source: VA Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care
Web Support for Caregivers of Elderly Veterans with Dementia
The goal is to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of two different approaches/ technologies in support of caregivers of Veterans with dementia (telephone support versus internet based support) on caregiver and veteran outcomes.
Role: Co-I, Total Award Amount: 151,709
Person months per year: 2.4

ID-122, Shorr (PI) 2010-2011
VHA Information Technology Innovation Program
Gait and Balance Assessment with Live Video from the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) Interface with Vista Imaging
A collaborative endeavor to enhance the gait & balance assessment of frail elderly veterans using a live assessment of a a 3-5 minute video feed, downloaded into the VISTA imaging interfaced with the patient’s CPRS, reviewed in “real time” by primary health care providers.
Role: Co-Investigator

VA HSR&D Merit Romero (PI) 2012-2015
Item Banking Across the Continuum of Care
The broad, long-term objective of this proposed research is to advance Veteran health care delivery by providing the VHA with a state-of-the-art measurement system that builds upon the well-established VHA infrastructure use of the FIM in IRFs and the MDS in CLCs.
Annual Direct Costs: $107,000
Person months per year: 3
Online and Telephone Skills-Building Program for Caregivers of Veterans with Stroke

The project evaluates a brief, low-cost, online and telephone skills-building intervention, using the existing and previously tested English- and Spanish-language VA RESCUE stroke caregiver website. The project also involves a feasibility test of the intervention targeting Spanish-speaking caregivers as a novel strategy to reduce cultural disparities.

Role: Co-I, Uphold PI
Total Award Amount: $199,500
Person months per year: 2.4

Development and Validation of a Self-Efficacy Item Bank.

This study will develop and pilot test self-efficacy patient reported outcomes item pools for the Patient Reported Outcomes System. Specific aims are: 1. To develop an item pool for assessing self-efficacy for self-management of chronic conditions, 2. To validate an item bank of self-efficacy in five chronic neurologic disorders, and 3. To investigate the derived measures of self-efficacy in chronic neurologic disorders.

Annual Direct Costs: $552,638
Person months per year: 2.4

Eyes Behind the Video Camera: Partnering with Families for Home Safety

The overall goal is to improve Veterans’ home safety. For this SPIRE proposal we will test the feasibility of partnering with caregivers to video-record the Veteran’s home for subsequent professional home-safety evaluations. In addition, we will investigate compliance barriers and facilitators to professionally prescribed home-safety modifications.

Annual Direct Costs: $100,000
Person months per year: 3

Rehabilitation Research Career Development Program

The overall goal of the RRCD Program is to increase the number of rigorously trained, extramurally competitive, and scientifically competent rehabilitation scientists who will conduct translational investigations, lead clinical research teams, and eventually mentor the next generation of occupational and physical therapy investigators.

Role: Associate Program Director

Internet and Telephone Support Intervention for Stroke Caregivers

This is a pilot project to test the impact of an online and telephone intervention designed to improve outcomes of stroke caregivers and Veterans.

Annual Direct Costs: $100,000
Role: Co-I
Development and Preliminary Testing an Annie Protocol to Deliver NIH-PROMIS Measures

The overall purpose of this line of research is to incorporate PROMIS measures into VA clinical practice using text-based technology (Annie). For this pilot we want to test the feasibility of this approach by creating an Annie protocol to deliver a PROMIS measure to Veterans.

Role: Principal Investigator
Annual Direct Cost: $16,000

Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network Telehealth Design, Plan and Service Support

This project aims at implementing and evaluating a telehealth-delivered arts therapy program for Veterans in North Florida/South Georgia.

Role: Co-Investigator
Annual Direct Cost: $192,000