

# DYNAMIC DIFFUSION NETWORK QUERI BULLETIN

*Newsletter of the DDN QUERI Program*



## INAUGURAL TEP MEETING CONVENED!

On September 23, the Technical Expert Panel (TEP) for the Dynamic Diffusion Network (DDN) QUERI program convened for its inaugural meeting. The purpose of the TEP to provide guidance and recommendations on the overall direction of the program. Thirty members representing Veterans, frontline staff, senior field leaders, and implementation researchers from across the nation came together to engage in a co-learning, co-sharing experience about the program's mission: to advance and spread VA promising practices in the two distinct health areas of moral injury and diabetes.

Members had an opportunity to learn more about the various aspects of the program, primarily the two evidence-based practices—Mental Health/Chaplain-led Moral Injury Groups (MIG) and Advanced Comprehensive Diabetes Care (ACDC)—which are gearing up to be implemented and evaluated at several VA sites across the country.

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# INAGURAL TEP MEETING CONVENED (CONTINUED)

Through this meeting, members were able to share their diverse perspectives and raise questions and thoughts for consideration to help clearly demonstrate the program's value and significance.

The following bullets highlight some feedback TEP members provided about the program and individual practices:

## Program-Wide

- Further specify the two implementation support strategies (DDN and Technical Assistance) using existing tools that help show practical value of the strategies.
- Examine the difference in the effectiveness of the DDN strategy for MIG compared to ACDC (differential effects of the two strategies by the interventions).

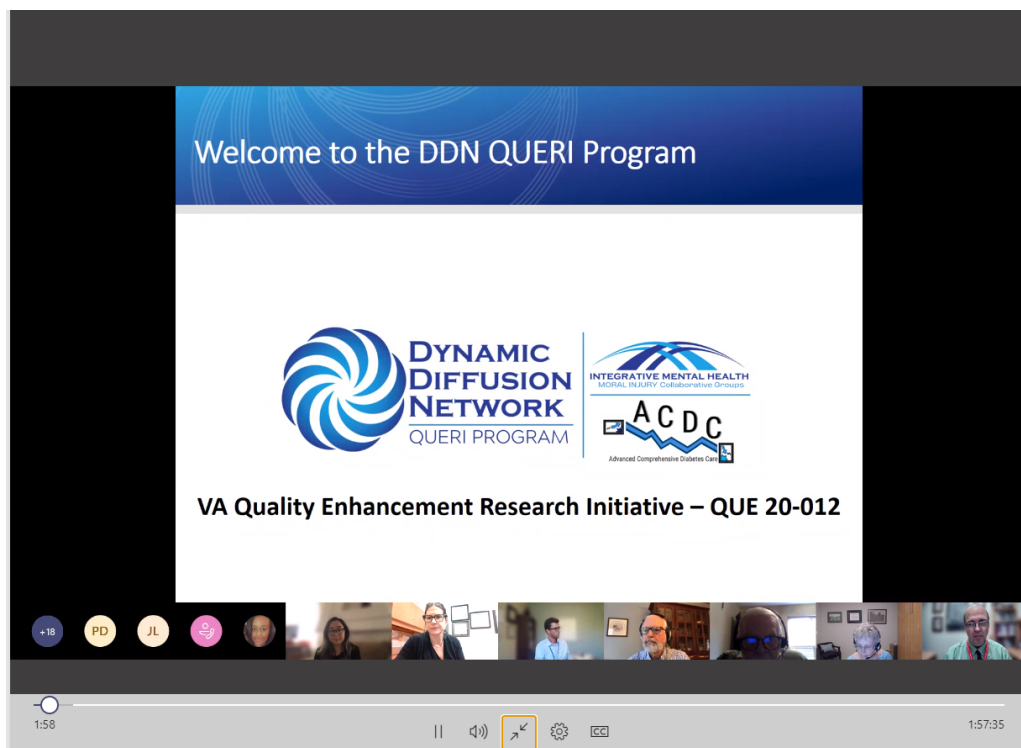
## Moral Injury Groups

- Define what moral injury looks like for the individual Veteran; any experiences that contributed to the moral injury; and evaluating meaning, purpose, and the overall impact of the groups.

## ACDC

- Consider social health determinants (e.g., housing, mental health, substance abuse, etc.) that may impact patients' poorly controlled diabetes & HbA1c.

The TEP will convene again next year for its annual meeting. In the meantime, the program will continue to stay engaged with members through frequent updates and other activities.



# MIG NEWS: A DYNAMIC DIFFUSION OF MORAL INJURY GROUPS

In 2019, VA Integrative Mental Health launched the Dynamic Diffusion Network (DDN) as an innovative approach to evidence-based care and quality improvement for novel or complex problems. The inaugural DDN focused on the novel problem of moral injury – a manifestation of psychological and spiritual distress that can result from a violation of what is “right” in the eyes of the individual – and the exceptionally complex challenge of suicide prevention. At present, there is not a singular “best practice” for delivering moral injury care or preventing suicide. Rather than identifying one “best” approach to be packaged and widely disseminated, the DDN model is designed to foster multiple promising approaches at once.

From 2019–2020, the pilot DDN was carried out with teams from 12 VA sites of care. Participating teams agreed to share their work and be open to change as they engaged with and learned from others doing similar work. Teams were comprised of a specially trained chaplain\* and a mental health provider from each site who collaborated closely on all aspects of the work. Over 16 months, teams delivered and continuously evaluated their care practices for moral injury and suicide prevention, participating in a structured network experience that promoted cross-pollination of ideas and shared learning to generate relatively rapid improvements in care. Activities included facilitated team calls, facilitated small and large group calls, review of group materials and curricula, regular reporting of activities and outcomes, direct observation of therapy groups and community events, and consultation visits. These activities provided structure, support, and accountability for a facilitated process of quality improvement focused on the following tasks:

- Identifying values and goals of the practice
- Describing the practice (i.e., what are we doing)
- Measuring outcomes (i.e., reach and effectiveness)
- Enhancing the practice (i.e., plan/do/study/act cycles)
- Telling the story (i.e., communicating practice impact and value)

Chaplains and mental health providers participating in the pilot DDN reported numerous benefits, including:

- Practice-related benefits, such as better defined/refined processes and procedures and exposure to new ideas;
- Professional benefits, such as enhanced knowledge and skills as well as access to subject matter expertise and local leadership;
- Pandemic-specific benefits, such as structured support to transition practices to virtual modalities;
- Relational benefits, such as the opportunity for connection and encouragement from peers;
- Personal benefits, such as developing confidence and experiencing a sense of purpose and meaning.

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# MIG NEWS: A DYNAMIC DIFFUSION OF MORAL INJURY GROUPS (CONTINUED)

The DDN QUERI Program will build on the inaugural DDN by further examining the impact of a DDN approach on the development, refinement, and delivery of moral injury groups. Participating sites have been selected, and a kick-off meeting is anticipated in May 2022.

Read the full article on the DDN model [here](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

\*Chaplains who were part of the pilot DDN had completed a year-long, subspecialty training in Mental Health Integration for Chaplain Services, offered by VA Integrative Mental Health.

[1] Smigelsky MA, Nieuwsma JA, Meador K, Vega RJ, Henderson B, Jackson GL. Mental Health and Chaplaincy Dynamic Diffusion Network: An Innovative Model to Advance Care for Moral Injury and Suicidality. *Healthcare: The Journal of Delivery Science and Innovation*. 2020 Sep;8(3):100440. PMID:32919579.

*"I have had a chance to have a specialty at the VA that I can really delve into and continue to learn about and read about...it's like an opportunity to have some expertise in something beyond, you know, PTSD or depression. It's novel."*

*-DDN Mental Health Provider Participant*

*"One of the skills that I believe I was able to foster and build upon was... I really started to see where I had a foothold. Maybe I wouldn't be called an 'expert,' I don't know, but I had a specialty in some of these specific areas. I think I really found my voice to be a leader and be [at the] forefront."*

*-DDN Chaplain Participant*

# ACDC NEWS: A CONVERSATION WITH DR. MATT CROWLEY

Interview by Sarah McDannold, MPH

**SM:** Thank you Dr. Crowley for taking the time out of your day to speak with me about the clinical practice, Advanced Comprehensive Diabetes Care (also known as ACDC).

**MC:** You're quite welcome Sarah.

**SM:** For starters, what brought you to the Durham VA?

**MC:** I came to Durham from New Hampshire to complete my Internal Medicine residency training at Duke. During residency and my Endocrinology fellowship at Duke, I spent a lot of time at the Durham VA, and was also fortunate to find excellent research mentorship through the Durham VA HSR&D Center, ADAPT. After my training, I stayed on as an Endocrinologist and Health Services Researcher at the Durham VA, and it's one of the best decisions I've ever made.

**SM:** Awesome! What led you to develop ACDC?

**MC:** During my training and early years as an Endocrinologist, I noticed that, for a subgroup of the patients I was seeing in clinic, nothing we tried seemed to impact their diabetes control, even after years of working together. I eventually came to recognize that clinic-based care just doesn't work well for some patients, likely because the contact is too infrequent to adequately support their diabetes self-management and adequately manage their medications. We coined this group as having 'clinic-refractory diabetes' - it turns out that up to 15% of all Veterans with type 2 diabetes fall into this category. We developed ACDC specifically for this group of patients. ACDC uses telehealth to maintain frequent contact with Veterans who have clinic-refractory diabetes and offers greater support for their self-management and medication management.



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*At end of FY 2021, 389 Veterans with previously poorly-controlled diabetes received ACDC. ACDC reduced HbA1c by a clinically and statistically significant 1.6% at 6 months.*

# ACDC NEWS: A CONVERSATION WITH DR. MATT CROWLEY (CONTINUED)

Interview by Sarah McDannold, MPH

**SM:** What are you most proud of in your work with ACDC?

**MC:** When it comes to ACDC, by far the thing I'm proudest of is that the intervention is actually being used in VA clinical practice and is making a difference for real-life Veterans. Research is fun, but to see the research we do actually change practice in the real world is extremely rewarding.

**SM:** Looking 5 years from now, what are your hopes for ACDC?

**MC:** I hope to see ACDC continue to expand and eventually become a nationwide initiative. If 5 years from now we've continued to make progress toward this goal, I'd be very happy.

**SM:** When you're not working on ACDC and caring for patients, what can one find you doing in your leisure time?

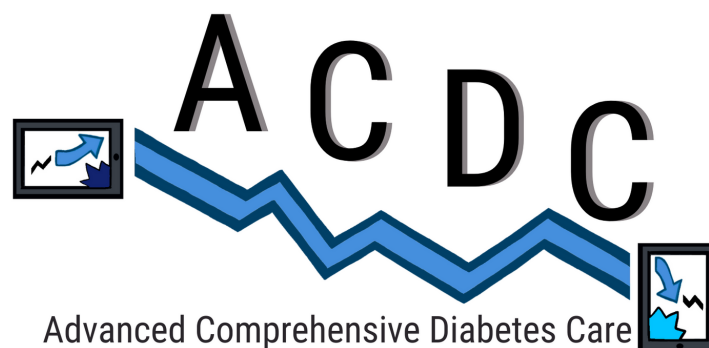
**MC:** I love spending time with my wife and 2 boys (13 and 11), and that's how I spend most of my time outside work. I exercise regularly, and love trail running around Durham. I also love music, both playing my own and seeing live music with friends whenever possible.

**SM:** Over the course of your career as a physician and researcher, what's 1 thing you've learned?

**MC:** To quote Teddy Roosevelt, "nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care." As both a physician and researcher, I've found that to be the truth.

**SM:** Thank you so much for speaking with me and sharing with readers of the newsletter. Much continued success with ACDC and the DDN QUERI Program.

**MC:** My pleasure Sarah, thank you in return.



# DDN QUERI SPOTLIGHT

## Meet Dr. Nancy Cooper!

**Technical Expert Panel Member  
Sergeant General Major (SGM) (Retired), U.S. Army  
Psychology Faculty, Trident Technical College**

**Hometown:** Charleston, SC

**Favorite Food:** Italian

**Favorite vacation spot:** Montego Bay, Jamaica

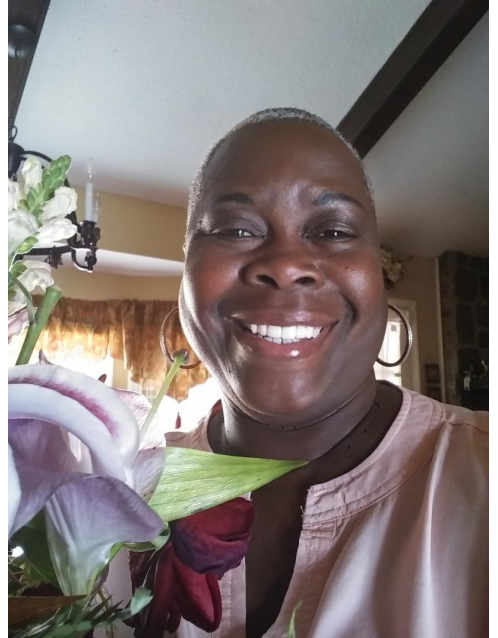
**When I have 30-min. of free time:** I enjoy the beauty around me and reflecting on the joys in my life.

**If I could have dinner with anyone in the world, who would it be with:** My mother

**One thing most people don't know about me:** I love mentoring young people.

**One life lesson I would share:** It doesn't matter how many coats of paint a leopard has over its spots, eventually the spots will show.

**Why I choose VA:** I trust the professionals that dedicate their talents and to those Veterans that work in the VA. They have a true understanding of what we as Veterans have gone through. Thank you all for what you do for our Veterans!



# DDN QUERI SPOTLIGHT

## Meet DDN QUERI Staff Member Summer Anderson!

**Program Coordinator, Implementation Core  
DDN QUERI Program  
Durham Center to Accelerate Discovery  
and Practice Transformation**



**Hometown:** Cedar Falls, Iowa

**Favorite Food:** I don't think I have a favorite :)

**Favorite vacation spot:** I enjoy traveling and exploring new places, but don't have a favorite vacation spot.

**When I have 30-min. of free time:** I enjoy taking a walk or finding a sunny spot to sit outside.

**One thing most people don't know about me:** I typically read 30-60 books each year - primarily via audiobook format and the vast majority being non-fiction, but over the last year I have slowly been trying to incorporate more novels into my reading lists.

**One life lesson I would share:** In almost every situation or experience, there is something to learn.

**What I enjoy most about working with the VA:** I believe VA provides some of the best healthcare in the world. I think it's really neat to be a part of projects that help promote evidence-based practice and facilitate the translation of cutting-edge evidence into clinical practice. I feel deeply privileged and honored to be part of a healthcare system that provides this care to our Nation's Veterans.



# ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

## 14th Annual Conference on the Science of Dissemination and Implementation in Health

Theme: Broadening Horizons for Impact: Incorporating Multisectoral Approaches into D&I Science

December 14 - 16, 2021

### Event Details

## National Wreaths Across America Day

December 18, 2021

*Each December on National Wreaths Across America Day, our mission to Remember, Honor and Teach is carried out by coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, as well as at more than 2,500 additional locations in all 50 U.S. states, at sea and abroad.*

The International Association of Military Women of Color, which is represented on the TEP will participate in this year's event.

<https://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/>

<https://www.iamwoc.org>

## 2022 AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting

June 4 - 7, 2022 (Abstracts due January 11)

### Event Details



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