

# Ask the Experts

Career Navigation During the Pandemic



# The Panel

- **Corrine Kliment, M.D., Ph.D.**
  - Pulmonary, Allergy & Critical Care Medicine  
University of Pittsburgh
- **Laura Petersen, M.D., M.P.H.**
  - Professor of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, and Director, Center for Innovations in Quality, Effectiveness, and Safety (IQuES), Houston VAMC
- **David Atkins, M.D., M.P.H.**
  - Director, Health Services Research and Development Service  
Department of Veterans Affairs
- **Discussants:** Julie Weitlauf & Mark Hager

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Career Development Award  
Enhancement Initiative



**The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the VA.**

**There are no relevant conflicts of interest to disclose.**

# A Road Map

- **Boots on the ground perspective (Pulmonary Medicine).**
  - **Corrine Kliment, M.D., Ph.D.**
- **Words of Encouragement from a Center Director**
  - **Laura Petersen, M.D., M.P.H.**
- **A View from the Top**
  - **Dr. David Atkins, Director HSR & D**
- **General Questions from the Audience**



# **COVID-19 and the Early-Career Physician-Scientist:**

## **Fostering Resilience beyond the Pandemic**

Corrine Kliment, MD, PhD

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Pulmonary, Allergy & Critical Care Medicine

University of Pittsburgh

# Perspective Team

## University of Pittsburgh

Corrine Kliment

Ian Barbash

Divay Chandra

Marc Gauthier

Keven Robinson

Leslie Scheunemann

Faraaz Shah

Alison Morris, Division Chief

## University of Pennsylvania

Jacob Brenner

Katherine Courtright

Jason Christie, Division Chief

# Fostering resilience

Goals for the perspective:

- To identify common challenges that early career faculty are facing
- To identify key stake holders and their roles, such as mentees, mentors, institutions and national organizations
- To thoughtfully determine ways to survive these challenges and even thrive

# Unique challenges as a pulmonary & critical care physician

- Full laboratory shut-downs which have been slow to rebuild given extra clinic time
- Additional clinical time devoted to back-up and COVID patient care
  - Less time for research
  - Less access to mentors who also face this
- Emotional toll of caring for critically ill patients during this time
- Research opportunities in COVID-related studies
  - Should we pursue these or not?

# Unique challenges for those physician-scientists with VA and Academic roles

- Additional clinical time devoted to back-up and COVID patient care
  - Often with back-up roles at both locations
  - Patient population differences
  - Faced increased strain on supplies/PPE for providers
- Heightened focus on COVID19-related research
  - In particular, the VA has adopted tools making it easier to complete COVID19 studies such as allowing external IRBs

<b>Challenge or Barrier</b>	<b>Proposed Intervention</b>
<b>Productivity</b>	
Loss of laboratory skill-set development	Engage laboratory members using online learning for specific laboratory techniques
Disruption of the tenure and promotion timeline	Offering an extension to the tenure clock
	Adjust promotion expectations
Inability to hire new research staff	Excluding junior investigators from hiring freezes
Loss of communication opportunities with leadership	Scheduling specific meetings to address ongoing concerns or challenges faced
<b>Funding transitions</b>	
Gaps in funding	Institutional commitment during anticipated gaps in funding
	Extend the funding application and completion timeline for active mentored awards
	Extend early stage–investigator status
<b>Professional development</b>	
Major conferences cancelled	Engage junior faculty in virtual presentations and actively incorporate them in committee activities
	Account for virtual involvement in promotion applications

<b>Mentorship</b>	
Loss of mentor/mentee interactions	Increase communication between junior and senior faculty outside of established mentor relationships, including nonclinical mentors
<b>Wellness</b>	
Disruptions to child, elder, and family care	Creation of centralized resources for child, elder, and pet care
Increased risk of faculty dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure an environment of inclusion, equity, and value within the institution</li> <li>• Create peer-support groups</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify role models to promote how to connect with purpose and adapt to changes</li> </ul>
Increased risk of burnout, physical and mental exhaustion	Promote and provide resources for self-care, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness applications</li> <li>• Counseling services</li> <li>• Virtual exercise communities</li> <li>• Mental health support</li> </ul>

- Maintain frequent but focused communication with mentors
- Prioritize and set small realistic goals for projects
- Take care of yourself and your family

# Fostering an environment of inclusion and support



Breathing is the greatest pleasure in life.

- Giovanni Papini

**Thank You!**

ckliment@pitt.edu





# Petersen, M.D., M.P.H.

**Professor of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, and Director,  
Center for Innovations in Quality, Effectiveness, and Safety  
(IQuEst), Houston VAMC**



How you have guided researchers at your setting, particularly the junior researchers, during this pandemic? What have you found most helpful?



How do you address concerns among junior researchers (e.g., CDAs) who might be afraid to disclose what they are facing during COVID?



Perspective is everything right now.

Can you tell us a little more about how you are fostering perspective among your early career researchers during this time?



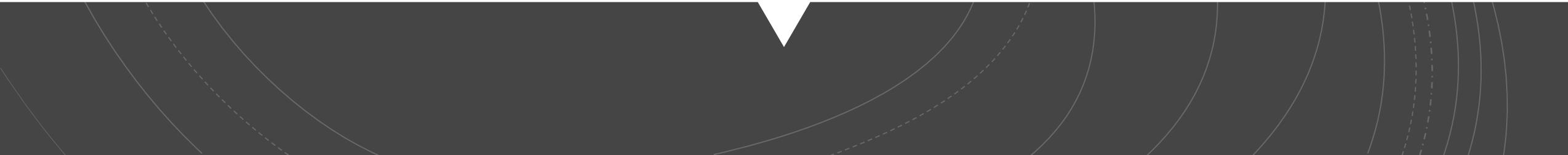
What about supporting wellness in your setting? What have you all found, initiated or implemented in your setting to promote wellness among your research staff?



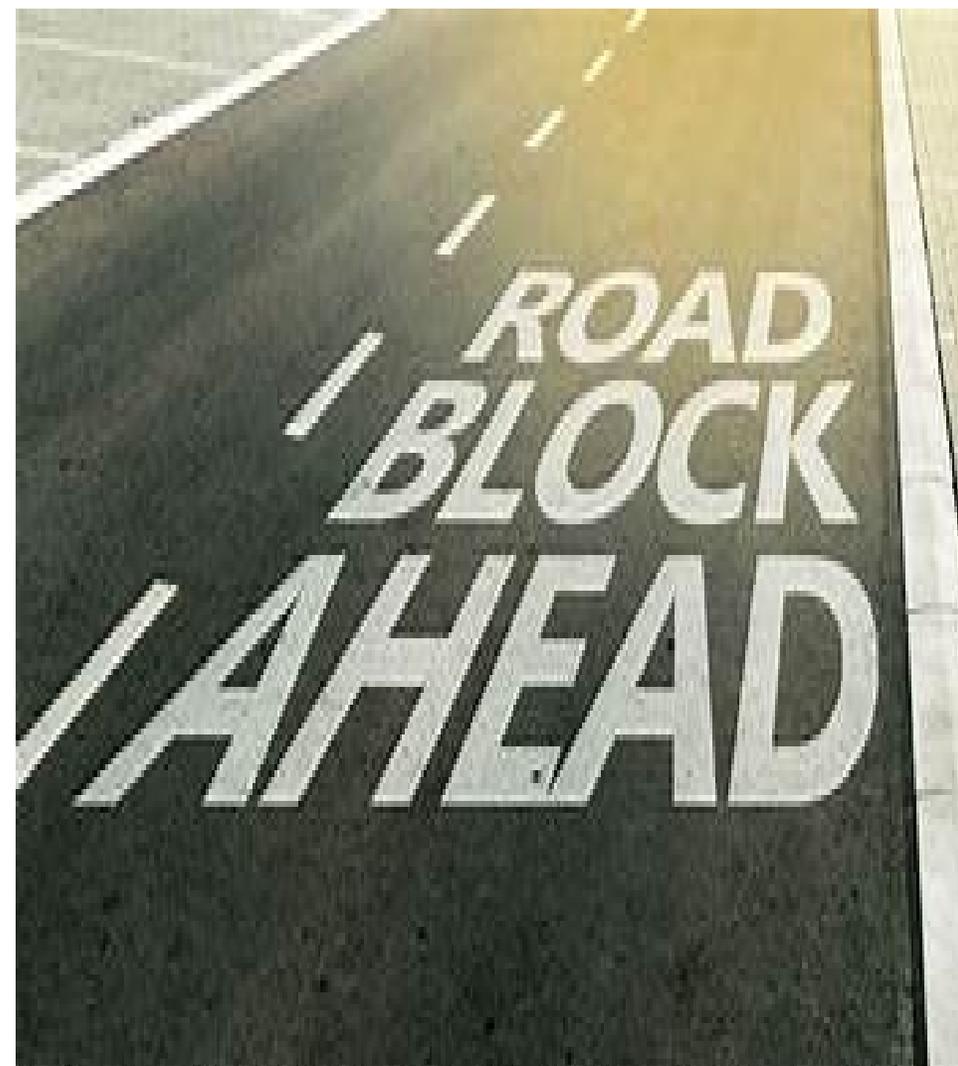
In your eyes, what is the most pressing need among the CDAs? In other words, how can VA research leadership continue to optimally support this group?

# David Atkins, M.D., M.P.H.

- Director, Health Services Research and Development



**Career Development Awardees** continue to have questions about changing/revising their study or project aims as the pandemic continues to evolve and challenge their research efforts. For CDAs that find pandemic driven roadblocks to their CDA projects, what is your advice?

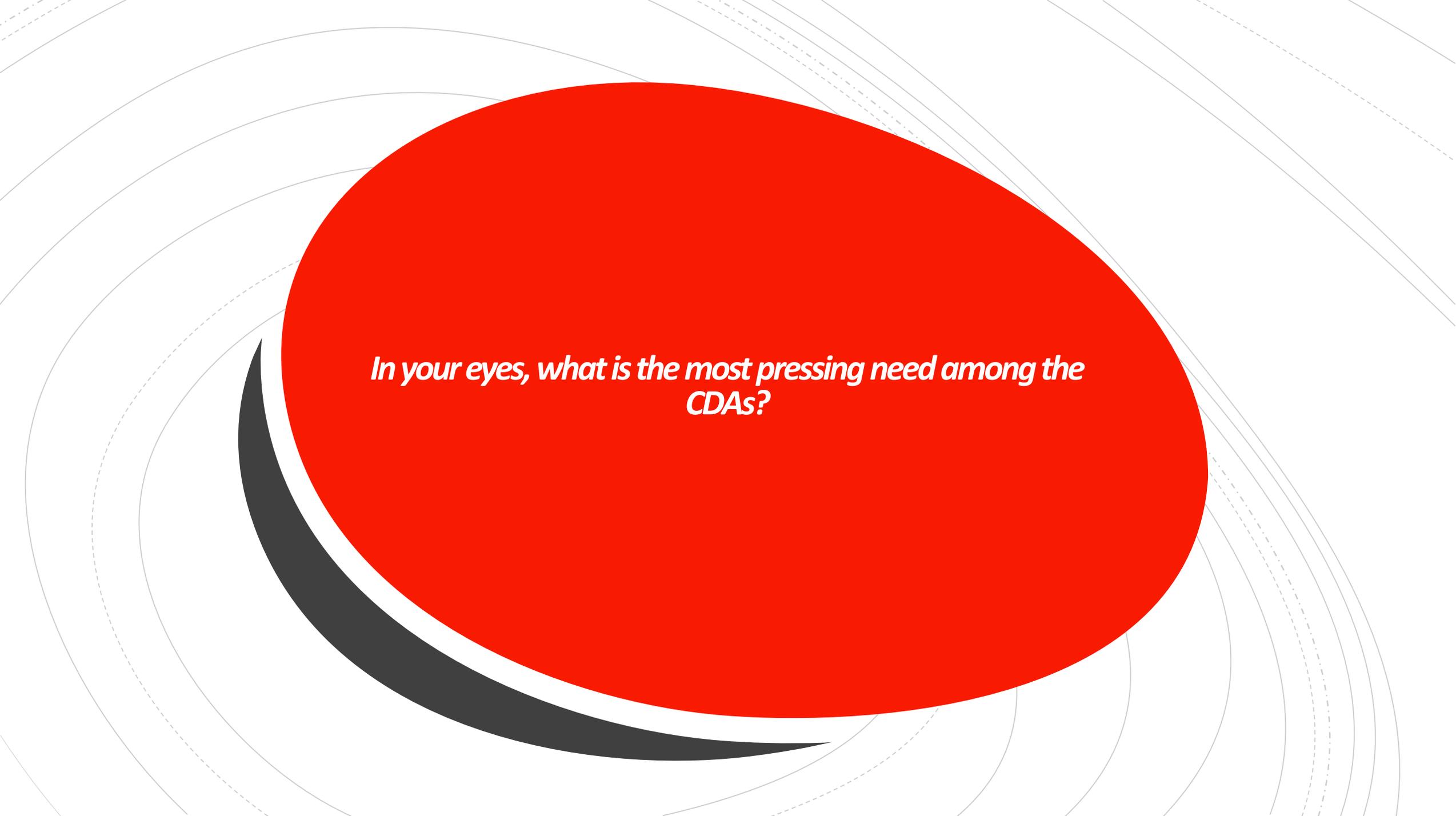




Are there any updates about whether or not CDA terms might be extended due to COVID related barriers and challenges?



CDA and early career researchers are worried that more limited productivity during COVID might harm their careers. What are your recommendations about managing variability in productivity during COVID? (Do you encourage documentation of pandemic related efforts, e.g., increased clinical time, on one's CV?)



*In your eyes, what is the most pressing need among the CDAs?*