



## **South Central MIRECC**

### **(VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center**

#### **Overview**

The South Central MIRECC was funded in 1998 and encompasses all or parts of eight states: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Texas, Florida, Alabama, and Missouri, extending from the panhandle of Oklahoma to the panhandle of Florida. The Center has anchor sites at five medical centers in Houston, Jackson, Little Rock, Oklahoma City, and New Orleans. It is closely aligned with the VISN 16 Mental Health Product Line, which oversees the delivery of mental health care, and the Mental Health Product Line Advisory Council, composed of representatives from all facilities mental health services.

The South Central MIRECC is known for its strong educational/training programs and clinical services initiatives. The South Central MIRECC has expertise in conducting large-scale clinical trainings in evidence based treatments and in implementing training (i.e., getting new skills into actual clinical practice). The South Central MIRECC also has a great deal of expertise in conducting health services research.

In 2007, the Office of Mental Health Services requested that the South Central MIRECC alter its theme to focus more on rural veterans, an important clinical priority. The South Central MIRECC is particularly well positioned to take on this challenge.

- VISN 16 treats more than 80,000 veterans annually for mental health problems, compared to an average of 45,474 in other VISNs
- Almost half of VISN 16 veterans live in rural areas
- Veterans residing in VISN 16 have the lowest per capita income, the lowest percent of college graduates
- Approximately 1 of every 4 veterans treated are ethnic minorities
- Veterans living in this network also report a higher physical and mental health disease burden relative to those in other VISNs
- In 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated small communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the city of New Orleans, and communities along the Texas-Louisiana border, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, some for many months, and contributing to mental distress

#### **Mission**

In early 2008, the South Central MIRECC's new theme, *"To improve access to evidence-based practices in rural and other underserved populations, especially returning war veterans, veterans experiencing natural disasters, and vulnerable elderly veterans,"* was approved. The South Central MIRECC's organizational structure includes four major components: Research, Education, Improving Clinical Care, and Research Training.

## Research

Currently, the South Central MIRECC has restructured its research programs to support the new rural theme. Toward this end, the South Central MIRECC has begun to survey mental health practices and educational needs of the VISN 16 Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). Our intention is to create a practice network among the 40 CBOCs within our VISN.

## Education

The South Central MIRECC is evaluating a strategy for implementing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in 22 medical centers and community clinics. The Educator Grant program has produced more than 30 excellent clinical education tools by frontline clinicians. These are listed on our web site (<http://www1.va.gov/scmirecc/>) and are available for free upon request.

## Improving Clinical Care

The South Central MIRECC is evaluating three models for providing mental health treatment in primary care clinics at all 10 medical centers and several CBOCs. Other projects and areas of clinical expertise include dementia, PTSD, the mental health problems of veterans with chronic medical diseases, and family and caregiver psychoeducation.

## Research Training

The South Central MIRECC has a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship program for physicians and psychologists. In addition, the Training Residents in Psychiatry Scholarship (TRIPS) is designed to attract psychiatrists (PGY-II residents) to a research career in the VA. The South Central MIRECC also periodically holds intensive grant writing workshops and mock grant review sessions to train others in successful grant writing techniques.

## Selected Studies and Projects

- *Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) Partnership for Improving Rural Mental Health Care.* The purpose of the partnership is to provide educational interventions and materials related to mental health treatment for CBOCs and to create a “practice network” of CBOCs that are interested in participating in research on rural mental health care.
- *Facilitating Implementation of Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Primary Care and Community-Based Clinics.* This controlled study examines the effect of external facilitation on implementation of brief cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in Primary Care (PC) and Community-based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs).

## Selected Publications

- **Sullivan G, Blevins D, Kauth M.** Translating clinical training into practice in complex mental health systems: Toward opening the “Black Box” of implementation. *Implementation Science*, v. 3 (33), 2008.
- **Fortney, J.** A Randomized Trial of Telemedicine-Based Collaborative Care for Depression. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, v. 22 (8), 2007.

## Leadership

Director – Greer Sullivan, MD, MSPH

Co-Director and Associate Director for Education – Michael R. Kauth, PhD

Associate Director for Research – John Fortney, PhD

Associate Director for Improving Clinical Care – JoAnn Kirchner, MD

Associate Director for Research Training – Mark Kunik, MD

## Contact

South Central MIRECC  
VA Medical Center (16MIR-NLR)  
2200 Fort Roots Drive  
North Little Rock, AR 72114  
(501) 257-1971