



## **VISN 4 MIRECC**

**Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center**



### **Overview**

The VISN 4 MIRECC is pleased to report that 2010 marked the Center's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. As one of 10 MIRECCs nationwide, the Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC) of the VA Healthcare-VISN 4 Network is a VISN-wide effort that reflects a collaboration between the Philadelphia VA Medical Center (PVAMC), the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS), and other VA Medical Centers within our VISN. Additional support is provided by two of our academic affiliates - the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Pennsylvania - and the VISN 4 leadership groups for the Behavioral Health and Primary Care service lines. The hub offices of the MIRECC are located at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. The fundamental mission of the MIRECC in VISN 4 is to improve the healthcare services and, ultimately, the quality of life and healthcare outcomes of veterans who suffer from mental illness.

### **Mission**

The mission of the VISN 4 MIRECC focuses on comorbidity (co-occurrence) of psychiatric disorders with physical illness and/or substance use disorders with the aim of improving the health, quality of life, and outcomes of healthcare services for veterans with mental illness. To provide guidance to clinicians, veterans, and their family members who are faced with these complex, real-world combinations of disorders, our MIRECC sponsors specialized research, educational, and clinical programs for a broad community of scientists, clinicians, VA patients, and their families. These programs are designed to contribute to the development, implementation, and evaluation of new and improved mental health and substance abuse care and to enhance integration of mental health and substance use disorder services with other components of general medical and psychiatric care.

### **Research**

The VISN 4 MIRECC sponsors research on a variety of comorbidity-related topics. The ultimate goal is to develop new empirical knowledge that can be directly applied to improve the clinical care of veterans. For example, the Center annually sponsors the VISN 4 MIRECC Pilot Project Program which awards a limited number of grants up to \$25,000 to support projects by investigators interested in the study of disorders appropriate to the Center's mission

### **Clinical**

To develop the best evidence-based practices, the VISN 4 MIRECC collaborates with other Centers of Excellence and Committees in the VA and organizations in the community to conduct various clinical demonstration projects. Several of these have transitioned into permanent programs within the VISN and across the VA, including the homeless prevention initiative and suicide prevention practices. The largest project to date has been the Behavioral Health Laboratory, which provides assessment and referral for depression and substance use disorders for veterans who screen positive for these disorders during primary care visits. In 2009, a Family Call Center was initiated to provide outreach to families of returning OEF-OIF veterans who are not yet enrolled in services. This year, in support of the medical home model, methods to provide telephone-based services to veterans in the community are being investigated. The VAPHS Time-Limited Case Management (TLC) program for patients with serious mental illness and comorbid substance use disorders is designed to reduce rehospitalization and to enhance adherence to treatment.

### **Education**

The Education Core serves a vital function within the VISN 4 MIRECC. The MIRECC sponsors conferences and workshops, as well as grand rounds and other educational programming related to comorbidity. The Center develops and makes available resources for clinicians, patients, and their family members including training manuals and videos; we conduct

direct training of students and clinicians; and supports a Research Fellowship Program for post-residency psychiatrists and post-doctoral psychologists and other mental health researchers.

In addition, the Center provides ongoing training and support for a range of local activities, including practicum training in serious mental illness, family involvement in treatment, and couples therapy, ongoing training and mentoring on the treatment of substance abuse through the Buprenorphine Initiative, and the publication of the VISN 4 *MIRECC Bulletin*. The MIRECC also supports and sponsors local, regional, and VISN-wide education trainings.

### **Select Studies and Projects**

Dr. Lauren Broyles is studying the most effective way to train inpatient nurses in alcohol SBIRT (*Implementing a Nurse Training Program for Alcohol Screening and Intervention in Inpatient Medical Settings*, RRP 09-164). MIRECC provided initial funding for the project through a MIRECC pilot project grant, has continued to partner with Dr. Broyles for this study, and will be assisting with the provision of continuing education units for participating nurses.

The *Buprenorphine in the VA (BIV) Project*, being conducted by Dr. Adam Gordon, improves the implementation of office-based treatment of opioid dependence in the VA, as well as the process of care and patient-level outcomes of those on buprenorphine. This clinical education and consultation initiative is ongoing. Project components include a Consult Service, Resource Guide, monthly newsletter, and semi-monthly online in-services.

Dr. Michelle Drapkin's research, *The Brief Addictions Monitor (BAM) in the VA Substance Abuse Treatment System*, will assess the feasibility and acceptability of a brief, reliable, and valid monitoring instrument, the Brief Addictions Monitor (BAM), that was developed by our group for the VA outpatient substance abuse treatment programs. The BAM is a 17-item multidimensional measure that assesses alcohol and substance use, as well as health and other psychosocial variables (e.g., income, social support, etc.).

A 4-year study just beginning is the *Complicated Family Reintegration in OEF-OIF Veterans*, in which Dr. Steven Sayers will examine whether the presence of psychiatric problems of returning veterans complicates the family reintegration process of veterans returning from combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This new funding will complement Dr. Sayers's continuing research on OEF-OIF veteran post-deployment reintegration.

### **Leadership**

Director – David Oslin, MD  
Pittsburgh Site Director – Gretchen Haas, PhD  
Philadelphia Co-Associate Director, Education – Steven Sayers, PhD  
Pittsburgh Co-Associate Director, Education – Dennis Daley, PhD  
Philadelphia Co-Associate Director, Clinical – Johanna Klaus, PhD  
Pittsburgh Co-Associate Director, Clinical – Adam Gordon, MD  
Philadelphia Co-Associate Director, Research – Henry Kranzler, MD  
Pittsburgh Co-Associate Director, Research – Robert Sweet, MD  
Philadelphia Administrative Officer – Dorothy McDougall  
Pittsburgh Administrative Officer – Deborah Coudriet  
Pittsburgh Program Coordinator – Sara Chapman, MS, OTR/L

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