



## **VA Capitol Healthcare Network MIRECC (VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center**

### **Overview**

The Department of Veterans Affairs' long-standing commitment to Veterans with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses (SMI) was expanded in 1999 with the creation of the VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC). The center is based at the Baltimore Division of the Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) with active research, educational and clinical program links across all VISN 5 facilities.

### **About Schizophrenia**

Schizophrenia is a serious and chronic mental illness characterized by symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thoughts and speech, disorganized or catatonic behavior, and negative symptoms such as apathy. Schizophrenia is also frequently associated with ongoing social, occupational and cognitive deficits and poor quality of life. Schizophrenia has a lifetime prevalence of nearly 1%. Treatment of schizophrenia accounts for about 2.5% of all U.S. health care costs and for about 10% of all totally, permanently disabled persons and perhaps 20% of the homeless in the United States.

### **Mission**

The primary mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC is to improve the care of all Veterans with schizophrenia and other SMI within the VISN, and ultimately, within the entire VA system and in the community at-large. This goal is achieved by: a) generating new research data, b) conducting educational programs, c) developing new clinical programs, and d) evaluating the cost of new programs and systems of care. We view the link between research, education, and clinical service as a continuum with an ongoing feedback loop, in which research leads to new educational curricula, which are then translated into new and more effective clinical interventions; at the same time, clinical and educational activities generate ideas for new research.

### **Research**

The Research Program, in keeping with the overall mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of services for Veterans with schizophrenia and their families, emphasizes research that promotes the translation of research findings into evidence-based practice. The VISN 5 MIRECC focuses primarily on six topic areas within schizophrenia: substance abuse; psychopharmacology; rehabilitation; health behaviors and medical comorbidity; recovery-oriented and family services; health services research. These cores are tightly integrated so that knowledge gained in one domain can be quickly applied to the others.

### **Clinical and Education**

The Clinical and Education Cores of the MIRECC play an integral and coordinated role in contributing to our ultimate goal of improving the care of Veterans with serious mental illness. They include a multi-faceted program of training, technical assistance and consultation, clinical program development, evaluation and needs assessment, and information dissemination. The overlapping goals of these two Cores are to:

- 1) Provide education, resources, and support to Veterans living with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses, and their families and caregivers.
- 2) Develop and coordinate opportunities for education and training of VA-based clinicians, researchers, trainees and policy makers who work with Veterans with SMI and their families.
- 3) Provide technical assistance and consultation to VA administrators and clinical staff.
- 4) Conduct needs assessments to generate ideas for clinical, research & educational programs.

- 5) Develop, implement, support and evaluate demonstration projects and other innovative clinical services.
- 6) Disseminate MIRECC generated findings and products to the VA and non-VA Community.
- 7) Establish the VISN 5 MIRECC as a regional and national resource for information, education, materials and technical assistance in the area of schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses.

### **Selected Studies and Projects**

- 1) **Assessing Recovery in People with Serious Mental Illness (SMI):** The purpose of this project is to develop a psychometrically sound, practical instrument to assess mental health recovery in people with serious mental illness and to examine recovery status and the relationship of recovery to hypothesized mediators and moderators over a 1-year retest interval.
- 2) **Randomized Trial of a Smoking Cessation Program for Persons with SMI:** This study compares a new behavioral treatment for smoking cessation (Behavioral Treatment for Smoking Cessation in Serious and Persistent Mental Illness; BTSCS) that combines pharmacotherapy, education, contingency management, and behaviorally-focused group treatment to a standard smoking cessation treatment for people with serious mental illness.
- 3) **Reducing Internalized Stigma in People with Serious Mental Illness:** This project is a randomized trial designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a 9-session group intervention aimed at reducing self-stigma among veterans with serious mental illness.
- 4) **VA Psychosocial Rehabilitation Training Program (VA-PRT):** The VA-PRT provides training, technical support, and consultation in Social Skills Training to VA staff, Veteran peer providers, and mental health program leaders working with individuals with SMI and their families. The VA-PRT also serves as the hub site for the VA Interprofessional Fellowship Program in Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery.

### **Selected Publications**

- Drapalski, A.L., Dixon, L.** (2011). Programmes to support family members and carers. In G. Thornicroft, G. Szmukler, K. Mueser, & R. Drake (Eds.), *Oxford Textbook of Community Mental Health, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Drapalski, A.L., Bennett, M., & Bellack, A.S.** (2011). Gender differences in substance use, consequences, motivation to change, and treatment seeking in people with serious mental illness. *Substance Use & Misuse, 46(6)*, 808-818.
- Lucksted, A., Drapalski, A. L., Calmes, C., Forbes, C., DeForge, B. & Boyd, J.** (2011). Ending self stigma: Pilot evaluation of a new intervention to reduce internalized stigma among people with serious mental illnesses. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 35(1)*, 51-54.
- Young, A.S., Niv, N., Chinman, M., **Dixon, L.**, Eisen, S.V., Fischer, E.P., Smith, J., Valenstein, M., Marder, S.R., & Owen, R.R. (2011). Routine outcomes monitoring to support improving care for schizophrenia: Report from the VA Mental Health QUERI. *Community Mental Health Journal, 47(2)*, 123-35.

### **Leadership**

Acting Director – Richard Goldberg, PhD  
 Acting Associate Research Director – Robert Buchanan, MD  
 Acting Associate Education Director – Melanie Bennett, PhD  
 Acting Associate Clinical Director – Seth Himelhoch, PhD, MPH  
 Administrative Core Manager – Amy Drapalski, PhD  
 MIRECC Coordinator – Matt Wiley, MPH  
 Administrative Officer – Mary Lupi

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