



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



OVERVIEW

Suicidality is an important public health concern, and research suggests that veterans are at particular risk.

In 2005, the Veterans Administration awarded a Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) to VISN 19 with the direction to conduct research, educational activities, and clinical work focused on addressing suicidality in the veteran population.

MISSION

The mission of the VISN 19 MIRECC is to study suicide with the goal of reducing suicidality in the veteran population. To carry out this mission, members of the VISN 19 MIRECC:

- Focus on cognitive and neurobiological underpinnings that may contribute to suicidality.
- Develop evidence-based educational and clinical materials to identify and optimally treat veterans who are suicidal.
- Provide consultation regarding assessment and treatment planning for highly suicidal veterans.
- Mentor researchers in the area of suicidology.
- Collaborate with others in the study and treatment of veterans who are at risk of suicide.

RESEARCH

Areas of research are varied and include: functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and psychiatric illness, Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS), traumatic brain injury (TBI) and negative psychiatric outcomes, new pharmaceutical treatments to reduce suicide attempts in veterans with TBI, the Interpersonal Psychological Theory of Attempted and Completed Suicide, the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality, suicide in incarcerated veterans, and the VISN 19 MIRECC Suicide Nomenclature and Classification System. The VISN 19 MIRECC has established successful collaborative relationships with a variety of civilian (e.g., Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment) and military systems (e.g., Department of Defense, Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center) which have facilitated research and subsequent dissemination. Information regarding specific research projects can be found on the VISN 19 MIRECC website: http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/VISN_19_Current_Research.asp

EDUCATION

Educating the public, VA providers, community health care professionals, and consumers regarding veteran suicide prevention is an additional aim of the VISN 19 MIRECC. Special emphasis has been placed on reaching providers who may be treating veterans who are not seeking care within the VA system. Efforts have included outreach to law enforcement providers, health educators, and members of the brain injury treatment community. In October 2008, the MIRECC sponsored and conducted a national TBI and Suicide Risk Assessment Conference in an effort to educate and disseminate information to both VA and community health care professionals on topics related to TBI, psychiatric symptoms, suicide, and executive dysfunction. The MIRECC also participates in outreach to returning OEF/OIF military personnel. Members of the VISN 19 MIRECC have developed a number of educational products, which provide information for those working with veterans who are at risk for suicide. These products include a brochure on TBI and suicide prevention, the Suicide Pocket

Card, and the Suicide and Self-Harm Classification System Clinical Tool and Worksheet. Further information regarding these products can be accessed on the website.

CLINICAL

The VISN 19 MIRECC Suicide Consultation Service was developed to address patient and provider needs, and is staffed by an interdisciplinary group of clinicians with expertise in suicide. Diagnostic conceptualization and treatment recommendations are provided to VA inpatient and outpatient mental health clinicians. Typical referral questions include the extent to which cognitive impairment is contributing to suicide risk, the relationship between trauma history and suicidality, and therapeutic (e.g., psychotherapy, medication) options for managing chronic suicidality and/or psychiatric distress. The assessment model employed involves a flexible combination of reviewing medical records, conducting a comprehensive clinical interview, administering psychological and neuropsychological testing including self-report measures of suicide-related constructs, and/or collecting collateral data (e.g., interviewing significant others/caregivers).

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Brenner, L. A., Gutierrez, P. M., Cornette, M. M., Betthausen, L. M., Bahraini, N., & Staves P. J. (2008). **A qualitative study of potential suicide risk factors in returning combat veterans.** *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 30*, 211 – 225.

Brenner, L. A., Harwood, J. E. F., Homaifar, B. Y., Cawthra, E., Waldman, J., & Adler, L. E. (2008). **Psychiatric hospitalization and veterans with traumatic brain injury: A retrospective study.** *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation, 23*(6), 401-406

Gutierrez, P. M., Brenner, L. A., & Huggins, J. A. (2008). **A preliminary investigation of suicidality in psychiatrically hospitalized veterans with traumatic brain injury.** *Archives of Suicide Research, 12*, 336-343.

Marchand, W. R., Lee, J. N., Thatcher, J., Thatcher, G. W., Jensen, C., & Starr, J. (2007). **A preliminary longitudinal fMRI study of frontal-subcortical circuits in bipolar disorder using a paced motor activation paradigm.** *Journal of Affective Disorders, 103*, 237-241.

Silverman, M. M., Berman, A. L., Sanddal, N. D., O'Carroll, P. W., & Joiner, T. E. (2007). **Rebuilding the Tower of Babel: A revised nomenclature for the study of suicide and suicidal behaviors. Parts 1 and 2: Background, rationale, and methodology.** *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 37*, 248-277.

Wortzel, H.S., Binswanger, I.A., Anderson, C.A., & Adler, L.E. (in press). **Suicide among incarcerated veterans.** *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law.*

LEADERSHIP

Director - Lawrence E. Adler, MD

Acting Associate Director (Salt Lake City) - William R. Marchand, MD

Scientific Director - Robert Freedman, MD

Director of Education and Psychology Fellowship - Lisa Brenner, PhD, ABPP

Director Psychiatry Fellowship - Hal Wortzel, MD

Administrative Officer - Douglas Blankenship, MA, HSM

CONTACT

VISN 19 MIRECC
Eastern Colorado Health Care System
1055 Clermont Street
Denver, CO 80220
303.393.5275