



## New York/New Jersey MIRECC (VISN 3) Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center

### Overview

The VISN 3 MIRECC provides treatment based on an evaluation infrastructure to support the research, education, and clinical programs within the VA NY/NJ Veterans Healthcare Network. We focus in maximizing recovery for veterans with *Serious Mental Illnesses* (SMI) by bringing research into practice. Our aim is to reveal the causes and most effective treatments of serious mental illnesses, through collaborations between four core domains: research, education, clinical interventions, and evaluation, the MIRECC implements research-based, state-of-the-art clinical interventions for veterans with serious mental illness as well as developing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of the educational interventions that improve the treatment of veterans with serious mental illness.

### Selected Studies and Projects:

#### Clinical Interventions and Evaluation

- Can Family/Caregiver Involvement Improve TIDES Outcomes?: This project will evaluate whether components of Family Psychoeducation (FPE), an evidence-based treatment for reducing relapse in the mental health sector, can be incorporated into the TIDES program to promote better adherence and reduced relapse in the primary care sector as well.
- Implementation of a Recovery-based Family Psychoeducation: This project will support a new program offering Family psychoeducation (FPE) to veterans with SMI and their families at the Bronx VAMC and the VA New Jersey Healthcare System.
- Suicide Assessment and Prevention Initiative: The VISN 3 evidence based suicide risk assessment for CPRS has now been in use at each facility between 1 year and 3.5 years. We are now developing a multi-phased evaluation of its impact on clinician practice and patient outcome.
- EQUIP II: VISN 3 is one of four study sites for the EQUIP II, service implementation research project developed by Alex Young in VISN 22. Veterans with SMI are recruited to engage in regular self assessment which becomes part of their medical record. These assessments are used to aid treatment decisions.
- Effectiveness of Switching from Polypharmacy to Monotherapy: This study will allow us to address the risks and benefits of staying on two antipsychotic medications versus discontinuing one while continuing on the other.
- Adverse Physiological Consequences of Antipsychotic Medications: Monitoring Patterns in VISN3: This study examines predictors of metabolic monitoring for patients who initiate treatment with a second-generation antipsychotic medication, using administrative data from 4 sites with VISN3.
- The Direct Impact of Cognitive Remediation on Functional Skills in Schizophrenia: This project aims to study whether computer-based cognitive training sessions, in addition to improving the cognitive functioning of people with schizophrenia, impacts their functional, social and vocational skills. cognitive augmentation strategy enhancing a second generation anti-psychotic.
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy for Chronically Suicidal and Self-destructive Veterans: A Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) program was developed at the Bronx VAMC, initially funded by a MIRECC education grant six years ago. The program has matured and now includes clinical, Education/ training and research components and interfaces with the Mount Sinai School of Medicine Mood and Personality Research Group. It is perhaps the first such program in the VA.

#### Research

- HT<sub>2c</sub>R and Suicide: Our study during the previous funding period of the VA Merit (01/05 –12/07) provides evidence for the molecular factors predisposing to suicidal behavior that are distinct from those of the psychiatric disorders in which it occurs.
- The Thalamus in Schizophrenia and Affective Disorders: The thalamus is the communication hub of the brain. Psychiatric disorders often involve abnormalities in the transfer of information from one brain region to another and are, therefore, likely to involve the thalamus.
- Glutamate and Myelin Dysfunction in Elderly Schizophrenic Patients: Our studies have shown that it is imperative to think of brain function within frameworks that integrate neurons and glia into functional units.

## Education

- Clozapine Education and Consultation Program: Clozapine is the gold standard for treatment refractory schizophrenia and has had a historically low usage in the VA and VISN 3. A targeted approach to support increased clozapine usage was designed. This has led to an increase of 65% in the usage of clozapine since the institution of this program.
- MIRECC Consultation Service (formerly Bronx-Montrose and Bronx Northport): The MIRECC provides expert second opinion conferences both live and via video teleconference on a regular basis (twice monthly at Hudson Valley, monthly at Northport, monthly on average at NY Harbor 1.5 times monthly at James J. Peters) for veterans who are not succeeding with their current treatment regimens.
- Experiential Education and Recovery Implementation: After a VISN wide conference: "Recovery in Action" which introduced VISN 3's recovery implementation initiative, the MIRECC organized veteran and staff focus groups to look at the barriers to recovery and needs of staff and veterans for implementation. We plan to evaluate the efficacy of this modality for implementation of recovery transformation in VA.
- MyHealtheVet My Recovery Plan Medication Management Module Dr. Levine chaired the committee that looked at providing on-line tools for veterans to help them manage their medication to enhance adherence. It will also be able to deliver decision aids about certain medication choices and issues as they become available.

## Selected Publications

Byne W, Hazlett EA, Buchsbaum MS, Kemether E (2008) The thalamus and schizophrenia: current status of research. *Acta Neuropathol.* Jul 5. [Epub ahead of print]

·Byne W, Dracheva S, Chin B, Schmeidler JM, Davis KL, Haroutunian V. (2008) Schizophrenia and sex associated differences in the expression of neuronal and oligodendrocyte-specific genes in individual thalamic nuclei. *Schizophr Res.* 98:118-28.

·Dracheva S, Byne W, Chin B, Haroutunian V. (2008) Iontropic glutamate receptor mRNA expression in the Oni-Orisan A, Kristiansen LV, Haroutunian V, Meador-Woodruff J, McCullumsmith RE: Altered Vesicular Glutamate Transporter Expression in the Anterior Cingulate Cortex in Schizophrenia. *Biol Psychiatry* 2008; 63:766-775

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·Dracheva S, Byne W, Chin B, Haroutunian V. (2008) Iontropic glutamate receptor mRNA expression in the human thalamus: Absence of change in schizophrenia. *Brain Res.* 1214:23-34.

·Oni-Orisan A, Kristiansen LV, Haroutunian V, Meador-Woodruff J, McCullumsmith RE: Altered Vesicular Glutamate Transporter Expression in the Anterior Cingulate Cortex in Schizophrenia. *Biol Psychiatry* 2008; 63:766-775

## Leadership

Director – Larry Siever, MD

Associate Education Director – Bruce Levine, MD

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