



VA Capitol Healthcare Network MIRECC

(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center

410-637-1850

Overview

The VISN 5 MIRECC is part of a nationwide program funded by Congress to improve health care and mental health care for all Veterans with mental illness. The mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC is to support and enhance the recovery and community functioning of Veterans with serious mental illness. Our integrated programs of research, education, and clinical training and consultation focus on the development, evaluation, and implementation of recovery-oriented evidence-based treatments and services for these Veterans. - See more at:

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/index.as>

The VISN 5 MIRECC is centered at the Baltimore Division of the Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), and involves substantial integration with the scientific expertise on serious mental illness and mental health services at the University of Maryland, School of Medicine. MIRECC activities are operational across the entire VA Capitol Health Care Network (VISN 5).

Mission

The mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC is to support and enhance the recovery and community functioning of Veterans with serious mental illness. Our integrated programs of research, education, and clinical training and consultation focus on the development, evaluation, and implementation of recovery-oriented evidence-based treatments and services for these Veterans. Our commitment to putting recovery into practice currently focuses around five major areas of emphasis: 1. Health and Wellness; 2. Family-Oriented Services; 3. Stigma; 4. Psychopharmacology and Neurobiological Bases of Serious Mental Illness, and; 5. Treatment and Community Engagement. To support this mission, our MIRECC built an integrated infrastructure to develop and advance coordinated programs of research, education, and clinical training and consultation. The conceptual framework developed to guide our quality of care focus called for an iterative process involving a continuous feedback loop starting with clinical research leading to the development of best practices followed by education and clinical training to support dissemination of such practices. The impacts of these practices on services, outcomes and costs are evaluated via health services research, which in turn are directed back to clinical scientists to stimulate further study and the development of new knowledge and improved treatments and services.

Research

The Research Program, in keeping with the overall mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC to support and enhance the recovery and community functioning of Veterans with serious mental illness, emphasizes research that promotes the translation of research findings into evidence-based practice. The VISN 5 MIRECC focuses primarily on five topic areas within serious mental illness: health and wellness, family-oriented services, stigma, psychopharmacology and neurobiological bases of illness, and treatment and community engagement.

Education

The VISN 5 MIRECC Education Core, includes a multi-faceted and coordinated program of education, training, dissemination, community networking, and technical assistance to help achieve the overall MIRECC mission of improving the recovery and community functioning of Veterans with serious mental illness. Drawing on findings from the MIRECC's Clinical Core and

Research Program, the Education Core promotes the translation of research and clinical findings into improved evidence-based practice. Core activities target diverse audiences including Veterans; their family members; VISN 5 mental health staff, clinicians, and Peer Support Specialists; research scientists; other VA service providers; and trainees across a variety of disciplines. Programs extend to community-based care, support, and advocacy organizations working with Veterans in the VISN 5 area. The specific goals of the Education Core are to:

- Offer educational opportunities and resources to Veterans living with serious mental illness, and their family members and caregivers, on topics related to mental health recovery.
- Develop and offer educational programming for VA clinicians, Peer Support Specialists, and trainees across disciplines on topics of importance to the effective treatment of Veterans with serious mental illness, including training in evidence based practices and other interventions studied as part of MIRECC supported research.
- Collaborate with researchers and policy makers on developing and offering educational activities for a variety of audiences across VISN 5 and VA nationally on topics related to serious mental illness and mental health recovery.
- Disseminate findings and products generated from MIRECC supported research throughout VA and to the non-VA Community, including collaborative exchanges of information and resources between the MIRECC, the facilities within VISN 5, and settings within neighboring communities. Establish the VISN 5 MIRECC as a regional and national resource for information, education, materials, and technical assistance in the area of serious mental illness.
- Implement evaluation for MIRECC educational programming to ensure broad reach and high quality.

Clinical

The Clinical Core is the operational arm of the VISN 5 MIRECC for all activities that involve clinical services and programs. Amy Drapalski, PhD is Associate Director for the Clinical Core and Anjana Muralidharan, PhD is the Assistant Director for the Clinical Core. Much of its activity involves linkage with the Education Core and Research Program in order to generate ideas and targets, and to enable their operations. The Mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC Clinical Core is to:

- Facilitate the successful implementation of clinical research protocols, including linking MIRECC investigators and clinical program directors.
- Provide clinical and operational consultation services for VISN 5 service providers and programs.
- Deliver training and consultation in evidence-based, Recovery-focused interventions for VA clinicians at local, regional, and national levels.
- Optimize the implementation of clinical education programs, including linking members of the VISN 5 MIRECC Education Core with program directors.
- Conduct systematic needs assessments to identify service gaps and generate ideas for new clinical, research, and educational programs.
- Conduct demonstration projects and field trials of innovative clinical services.
- Evaluate the process and outcome of Clinical Core collaborations and other activities

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) **Developing Telephone-based Cognitive Therapy for Veterans with PTSD:** Post-Traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is highly prevalent among war veterans. Increasing interventions using emerging communication technologies to assess and enhance treatments are being used for a variety of somatic and mental health conditions. The goal of this project is to develop a telephone based psychotherapy intervention based on an evidenced based

treatment approach, cognitive processing therapy, targeting PTSD among veterans with PTSD.

- 3) 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.
- 4) 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.

Selected Publications

Aakre, J.M., Himelhoch, S., Slade, E.P. (2014). Mental health service utilization by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans following entry into PTSD specialty treatment. *Psychiatric Services*, 65(8), 1066-1069, 2014

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.

Himelhoch, S., Slade, E., Kreyenbuhl, J., Medoff, D., Brown, C., & Dixon, L. (2012). Anti-depressant prescribing patterns among VA patients with schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Research*, 136 (1-3), 32-35.

Leadership

MIRECC Director – Richard Goldberg, PhD

Associate Director of Research – Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD

Associate Director of Education – Melanie Bennett, PhD

Associate Director of Clinical – Amy Drapalski, PhD

Assistant Director of Research – Robert Buchanan, MD

Assistant Director of Education – Samantha Hack, PhD, LGSW

Assistant Director of Clinical – Anjana Muralidharan, PhD

Assistant Director of Advanced Fellowship Program – Beth Klingaman, PhD

Administrative Officer – Steve Day

Contact

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