



MIRECC Matters

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Letter from the Acting Director

Richard Goldberg, Ph.D.

Strengthening Our Core and Extending Our Reach and Value

Last issue I outlined several emerging priorities to help extend and enhance our mission to promote the recovery and community functioning of Veterans with schizophrenia and related disorders. These included sharpening our focus on the needs of women and older Veterans with serious mental illness as well as younger Veterans seeking initial treatment for a psychotic disorder. We also underscored our commitment to peer-delivered services and supports.

For this issue, I would like to highlight how our efforts to integrate and coordinate activities across our research, education and clinical units both advance these priorities and extend our reach and value. Specifically, we are committed to ensuring that MIRECC programming and research: (1) Positively impact mental health and educational programming across VISN5, (2) Create synergy and collaboration among investigators across MIRECCs and other VA Research Centers of Excellence, and (3) Support VACO initiatives and programming.

To illustrate, our commitment to promote the health and well-being of women Veterans with serious mental illness has already resulted in a flurry of activity from across our functional cores. Building on the success of our April, 2012 Conference titled "Supporting the Mental Health of Women Veterans", two MIRECC investigators were invited to join the VA Reproductive Mental Health Steering Committee led by Laurie C.

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Letter from the Acting Director

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Zephyrin MD, MPH, MBA, FACOG, Director of Reproductive Health for the Women Veterans Health Strategic Healthcare Group (WVHSHG). Planned products of this initiative include the development of a core curriculum in reproductive psychiatry to be disseminated across the VA system as well as a telemedicine/web-driven tool to facilitate consultative requests of VA clinicians caring for female veterans with reproductive mental health concerns. In the research area, the MIRECC has funded two pilot studies in this area. Dr. Amy Drapalski will be conducting interviews with female veterans and mental health providers to understand the family planning and contraceptive counseling needs of women veterans with mental illness. Dr. Rebecca Wald will assess beliefs which may represent barriers to utilization of VA mental health services among female veterans. In addition, Dr. Julie Kreyenbuhl recently submitted a Merit Award proposal to VA HSR&D to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to evaluate gender differences in the extent and consequences of weight gain from antipsychotic and mood stabilizer medications commonly prescribed to veterans with serious mental illnesses.

Our clinical, education and research cores are also working to advance our commitment to improving the lives of older Veterans with schizophrenia and related disorders. We are planning a conference for Spring of 2013 to focus on the needs of older Veterans with serious mental illness, and we have been working with local administrative data to help characterize the treatment and service needs of this vulnerable population. In FY10, 35% (n=2256) of the 6505 Veterans with an SMI diagnosis across VISN 5 were 60 years old or older; 12% (n=779) were 70 years old or older. Among those 60 and older, 17% (n=391) had a general medical stay in FY10.; 67% (n=1508) had 2 or more outpatient encounters during, and 37% (n=845) had an ER encounter in that same year. Continued review of administrative data combined with consultation from VISN 5 providers and administrators will help inform and define future educational and clinical demonstration programs. We are also looking to partner with investigators at other MIRECCs and National VA Centers of Excellence to develop a program of research in this area as part of our commitment to addressing the needs of older Veterans.

We are also excited about related efforts to help advance our developing focus on younger Veterans experiencing psychosis. Dr. Gioia will be conducting a VISN 5 MIRECC funded qualitative study of young veterans receiving treatment for psychosis. This study is part of a larger commitment to develop an early intervention strategy for Veterans.

The VISN 5 MIRECC is also working to develop, evaluate and disseminate peer delivered services and supports. Examples include initial efforts to organize and sponsor a VISN-wide training for peer providers in the facilitation of Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP), and pending notice of funding, implementation of a large research trial to evaluate a peer co-facilitated medical illness self-management intervention.

In addition to generating new research and programming in all of these areas, we look forward to continuing and extending our collaborations with others across the VHA, partnering with local stakeholders, and contributing to VACO priorities and initiatives. Dr. Eric Slade, for example, was just awarded a HSR&D Merit to partner with VA NEPEC to examine VA's spending on mental health residential treatment and other services for OEF/OIF Veterans with PTSD. He is also expecting to start a Mental Health QUERI project in collaboration with the VISN 22 MIRECC to conduct a retrospective cost-effectiveness of an intervention to improve care for schizophrenia. Building on my recently completed RR&D funded trial of using MOVE! with seriously mentally ill Veterans, Dr. Kreyenbuhl and I are serving as study co-investigators on an HSR&D funded Merit to evaluate a web-based delivery of MOVE! with seriously mentally ill Veterans that is being conducted within VISN 22. Regarding national contributions, two of our investigators currently serve on VA Scientific Merit Review Boards and two are members of VA Mental Health QUERI workgroups.

We are scheduled to meet with our external advisory board in early November to help inform and advance all of these efforts as part of our commitment to putting recovery into practice and improving the lives of Veterans living with serious mental illness.



***MIRECC Matters* is also available online:**
www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/newsletter.asp

HIV and Mental Health: The Basics and Beyond

Rebecca Wald, Ph.D.

On June 11th, 2012, the VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC) sponsored a conference entitled "HIV and Mental Health: The Basics and Beyond." The conference was designed to inform VA staff, Veterans, and other interested parties about the unique mental health needs of Veterans with HIV, as well as to increase their knowledge about the current state of HIV diagnosis and treatment. Over 70 VA mental health providers and Veterans from across VISN 5 attended the conference, which was supported by the Office of Mental Health Services (OMHS) and held at the SMC Management Center on the campus of the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

The conference opened with a broad overview of the epidemiology, course, and treatment of HIV, presented by Dr. Kris Ann Oursler, a physician specializing in infectious disease and the Deputy Director of the Baltimore VA Infectious Disease Clinic. The second speaker was Dr. Virginia Kan, an infectious disease specialist who heads the Infectious Disease Laboratory at the VA Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Dr. Kan explained how and why HIV testing is performed in the VA, and discussed HIV risk reduction counseling with at-risk Veterans.

Dr. Glenn Treisman, Director of the AIDS Psychiatry program at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, presented about interactions between serious mental illness and HIV disease, emphasizing ways in which serious mental illness can complicate the treatment of HIV. Dr. Treisman's talk was followed by a related presentation from Dr. Steven Safren, Director of Behavioral Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Safren discussed the impact of depression on HIV treatment, and described methods of improving HIV medication adherence and treatment outcomes by treating depression.

Following a break for lunch, the conference reconvened to discuss more narrowly-defined topics in HIV and mental health. Dr. Ned Saktor, Professor of Neurology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, presented about the epidemiology, diagnosis, and treatment of HIV-related dementia. Dr. Devang Gandhi, an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and a psychiatrist at the Baltimore VA, presented about substance use epidemiology and treatment among Veterans with HIV. Finally, Derek Spencer, a nurse practitioner and Director of the JACQUES Initiative at the University of Maryland's Institute of Human Virology, presented about spirituality issues related to HIV.

A common theme that emerged throughout the conference was the significant impact that mental health conditions can have on the physical health of persons with HIV, and thus the correspondingly significant impact that VA mental health providers can have on improving health outcomes for Veterans with HIV. Attendees left the conference equipped with new information and new tools for supporting Veterans who are at risk for, or infected with, HIV disease.

A common theme was the significant impact that mental health conditions can have on the physical health of persons with HIV, and the significant impact that VA mental health providers can have on improving health outcomes for Veterans with HIV.

Club Vet Hosts Successful Stigma Conference at DC VA, Supported by MIRECC Small Grant

The MIRECC's recovery-fostering Small Grants Program was happy to support the recent "Stigma Conference: For All Veterans Overcoming the Stigma of Seeking Mental Health Treatment" held at the Washington DC VA Medical Center on May 24th 2012. The conference was initiated and organized by Club Vet, an alumni group of the DC VA PRRC, working with DC VA mental health staff.

After official greetings and introductions, three speakers addressed an audience of more than 60 people regarding stigma and its impacts. Ms. Mercia D. Bowser (St. Elizabeths Hospital) discussed stigma that Veterans face in the VA and regarding mental health care. Then, Dr. Donna Holland Barnes (Howard University) spoke about ways stigma can be a barrier to getting the care one wants and needs, and how to address this. Additionally, Dr. Amy Drapalski (VISN-5 MIRECC) spoke about *self*-stigma, its causes, negative effects, and how to reduce or eliminate it. Afterwards, Dr. Drapalski said, "Stigma and self-stigma are crucial problems that impact Veterans' well-being and use of mental health services. This meeting was an important part of discussing how we can reduce both."

The conference was capped off with a panel discussion in which members of Club Vet and the audience discussed their personal experi-

-ences of stigma in health care, including in the VA, and how the speakers' presentations could be used to address these.

Almost all attendees (52 out of 65) were Veterans; others included staff, family members, outside guests, and active duty personnel. All gave the conference high reviews, with most rating it "excellent" and almost 100% saying they'd like to attend future such events.

Arthur Goff, President of Club Vet, said that attendees "really valued the chance to hear speakers talk about stigma within the VA while being able to ask questions and share their own experiences." He said that Club Vet often serves as a sounding board for Veterans who feel their needs are not being met and wants to help address the problem of stigma.

In fact, Club Vet is building on this success by inviting Dr. Barnes back for a Suicide Prevention Week program on September 4th from 10am – 12noon. She will be offering a workshop focused on the links between stigma and suicide prevention. Although this MIRECC Matters will come out after Dr. Barnes' workshop, for information about it or other activities of the DC Club Vet contact Mr. Arthur Goff at arthurgoff2000@yahoo.com.

If you are interested in applying for a MIRECC Small Grant, please see the application on our website [www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5] or contact Alicia Lucksted at Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov or 410-706-3244

Meet a MIRECC Investigator

AN INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIA AUTRY, MPH, FAC-P/PM

Sophia Autrey, MPH, FAC-P/PM, is a Health Science Specialist for the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Training (PRT) Program. She received her masters degree in Public Health with a concentration in Health Administration and Policy from Morehouse School of Medicine in 2002. Prior to joining MIRECC, Mrs. Autrey was a Public Health Evaluator for the Georgia Division of Public Health, Office of Birth Outcomes. She has also worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Infectious Diseases. Her expertise as an evaluator includes quantitative and qualitative analyses, survey methodology, performance management, and strategic planning.

1) Tell us about your area of research.

My area of expertise is in Public Health evaluation and management. Program evaluation can be scary for project managers due to various misconceptions about the true purpose of evaluation. The most common misconception is that evaluations are used as a justification for shrinking or closing a program. While some evaluations may result in restructuring or closure, more often the goal is to identify areas of opportunity, growth, and best practice. One of the first orders of business when I meet with program managers is to establish an evaluation purpose. The key is to not approach the initial interview with preconceived notions or biases about the program. Instead, let the data tell the story.

2) What studies/programs of research are you currently working on?

I am working with MIRECC staff on the implementation and outcome evaluation for the Social Skills Training (SST) Evidence-Based Practice dissemination. As the program evaluator, I work with ex-

perts in SST to conduct an evaluation that includes continual reviews of the workshop's validity, quality assurance sessions with consultants and trainers, and quality improvement recommendations. I also conduct an evaluation of the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery (PSR&R) Fellowship didactic seminar series. This has resulted in expanded seminar topics and more recovery-oriented content areas throughout the fellowship year. I am also working with the clinical staff in Perry Point to evaluate the development and implementation of the Recovery Center. As part of its steering committee, I have been involved with the development of the Recovery Center from its inception. I developed the evaluation plan and facilitated client focus groups regarding program services. The primary purpose of the evaluation for the Perry Point Recovery Center is to track and evaluate service utilization. The development and implementation of the Perry Point Recovery Center has received national recognition from accreditation bodies for its innovation. Because of its success, the Recovery Center concept will be expanded to include the Baltimore facility in the near future.

3) What are the implications or potential benefits of your program of research for Veterans?

My purpose as an evaluator is to ensure that the services and programs the Veterans most need are provided in an efficient manner. This purpose is promoted and supported by my status as an external evaluator. Because I provide my services from an external point of view, it gives me a certain objectivity and allows me the freedom to retain my mission of ensuring Veterans' needs are met. The programs that utilize my consultation services know that my recommendations result in an improvement in service delivery.

4) How can people get in touch with you if they have questions about your work?

Please feel free to give me a call at 410-637-1858 or e-mail me at Sophia.Autrey@va.gov.

Recent MIRECC Publications and Presentations

VISN 5 MIRECC staff are listed in **bold**:

Publications:

Boyd, S. J., Fang, L. J., **Medoff, D. R., Dixon, L. B.**, & Gorelick, D. A. (2012). Use of a 'microecological technique' to study crime incidents around methadone maintenance treatment centers. *Addiction, 107* (9), 1632-1638.

Fischer, B.A. (2012). The unofficial myths of schizophrenia. [Invited editorial]. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 200*(7), 567-568.

McGinty, E.E., Zhang, Y., Guallar, E., Ford, D.E., Steinwachs, D., **Dixon, L.B.**, Keating, N.L., & Daumit, G.L. (2012). Cancer incidence in a sample of Maryland residents with serious mental illness. *Psychiatric Services, 63*(7), 714-717.

Wehring, H.J., Liu, F., McMahon, R.P., Mackowick, K.M., Love, R.C., **Dixon, L.**, & Kelly, D.L. (2012). Clinical characteristics of heavy and non-heavy smokers with schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Research, 138* (2-3), 285-289.

West, J.C., Rae, D.S., Mojtabai, R., Rubio-Stipec, M., **Kreyenbuhl, J.A.**, Alter, C.L., & Crystal, S. (2012). Clinically unintended medication switches and inability to prescribe preferred medications under Medicare Part D. *Journal of Psychopharmacology, 26*(6), 784.

Xiang, Y.T., Dickerson, F., **Kreyenbuhl, J.**, et al. (2012). Prescribing patterns of low doses of antipsychotic medications in older Asian patients with schizophrenia, 2001-2009. *International Psychogeriatrics, 3*, 1-7.

Xiang, Y.T., Hou, Y.Z., Yan, F., **Dixon, L.B.**, Ungvari, G.S., Dickerson, F., Li, W.Y., Li, W.X., Zhu, Y.L., Chan, S.S., Lee, E.H., & Chiu, H.F. (2012). Quality of life in community-dwelling patients with schizophrenia in China. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 200*(7), 584.

Presentations:

Autrey, S. (2012, May). *Effective Program Evaluation using SMART Objectives and Performance Measures*. Workshop presented at the 37th Annual USpra Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

Dixon, L., Drapalski, A., Glynn, S., Cohen, A., & **Medoff, D.** (2012, June). *The Effectiveness of Shared Decision Making for Persons with Mental Illness in Promoting Recovery and Family Involvement in Care*. Poster presented at the Academy Health Annual Conference, Orlando, FL.

Lucksted, A., Boyd, J., **Drapalski, A., Charlotte, M., & Prince, A.** (2012, May). *Ending Self-Stigma: Recovery and Psychosocial Rehabilitation*. Workshop presented at the 37th Annual USpra Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

Schooler, N.R. (2012, April). *PROACTIVE: Initial results of an RCT comparing long-acting injectable risperidone to 2nd generation oral antipsychotics*. In N.R. Schooler (chair) Long-acting injectable antipsychotic medications: do recent studies change our understanding of their role in the treatment armamentarium? Symposium conducted at the 3rd Biennial Schizophrenia International Research Conference, Florence, Italy.

Schooler, N.R. (2012, May). *RAISE-ETP Study: Rationale and Study Design*. Presentation at The Next Frontier in Mental Health: From Research to Patients, Toronto Ontario, Canada.

Schooler, N.R. (2012, May). Workshop Chair, Psychosocial Treatment Platforms in Psychopharmacology RCTs. NCDEU 52nd Annual Meeting, Scottsdale, Arizona, May 2012.

Comings and Goings

There have been many comings and goings at the MIRECC over the last few months.

Welcome to two new Research Assistants! John Freimuth, MA and Josh Clark, MA have both joined the MIRECC as Research Assistants based at the DC VAMC. Mr. Freimuth earned his MA degree in psychology from Catholic University in 2010 and worked as a research analyst supervising and overseeing data delivery and reporting on health-related topics at a consulting firm in Washington DC. In 2009-2010 he was involved in the Consortium Research Fellows Program at the Department of Defense. Throughout his training, Mr. Freimuth has been involved in research projects focused on correlates of depression, and he has worked clinically with children with mental illness. Mr. Clark is currently a 5th year graduate student in clinical psychology at American University. His dissertation research involves an examination of self-compassion as a coping strategy, and he has had a range of clinical experiences including working with Veterans with mental illness and leading groups in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy at the Washington DC VA Primary Care Behavioral Health Program. Both Mr. Freimuth and Mr. Clark will be working on VA-funded research on recovery and smoking cessation in Veterans with serious mental illness. Welcome!

And farewell to several MIRECCers who have moved on to new opportunities:

Katrina Spencer, MA left the VISN 5 MIRECC to pursue direct care work with children and families in Pennsylvania. She worked at the MIRECC as the research coordinator for several studies of recovery and stigma among people with serious mental illness. Melissa Johnson, Ph.D. left the MIRECC for a clinical psychologist position at the Center for the Treatment of Addictive Disorders at the Pittsburgh VAMC. Dr. Johnson began at the MIRECC as a Post-Doctoral Fellow in September of 2011. Sarah Dihmes, MA has left the MIRECC to become the Study Coordinator/Chief Investigator of a study of ways to improve coping among male caregivers of breast cancer patients that is funded by Alliant University. Ms. Dihmes worked on a range of MIRECC projects and initiatives as an Administrative Coordinator. Research Assistants Matt Kendra, MA and Viara Quinones-Jackson, MA recently left the MIRECC to complete their year-long pre-doctoral internship training on the way towards completing their doctoral degrees. Mr. Kendra and Ms. Quinones-Jackson were responsible for recruitment, assessment, and clinical service for several MIRECC studies running at the DC VAMC. Mr. Kendra is a graduate student at George Mason University and is completing his internship at the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Healthcare System in Palo Alto, California. Ms. Quinones-Jackson is a graduate student at Howard University and is completing her internship at the VAMHCS/UM Psychology Internship Consortium at the Baltimore VAMC. Research Assistant Julia Surow, MA left the MIRECC for a research assistant position in the Department of Public Health at the University of Maryland, College Park. Ms. Surow worked primarily at the Perry Point VA Medical Center, coordinating recruitment and conducting assessments for MIRECC studies of recovery and smoking cessation.

Thanks to all of you for your many contributions to the VISN 5 MIRECC!

Upcoming Conferences and Events

MIRECC SCIENCE MEETINGS

The MIRECC organizes a series of meetings at which invited speakers and local researchers present research findings, discuss other projects they are working on to get input from peers, or discuss other research-related issues. These meetings occur twice per month and are held in the MIRECC conference room (7th Floor Baltimore Annex). Dates, speakers, and topics for the fall are listed below. Please contact Melanie Bennett (Melanie.Bennett@va.gov) for more information.

September 25: Drs. Amy Drapalski and Alicia Lucksted — Ending Self Stigma:
Progress Report on NIH and VA Projects

October 23: Dr. Will Carpenter— Defining Psychosis in DSM-5: An Update

November 13: Dr. Alan Faden — Revising Concepts About Brain Trauma and Sports-Related Head Injury

November 27: Dr. Faith Dickerson — Peer Mentors to Improve Smoking Cessation in
Persons with Serious Mental Illness

December 11: Dr. Ann L. Gruber-Baldini — Delirium Assessment in Older Hospitalized Patients

RECOVERY-ORIENTED SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM

Application Deadlines for 2012: 1st of March, June, September, & **December**

Small Grant Amount: \$300-\$5000

The VISN 5 MIRECC offers a small grant mechanism to fund recovery-oriented clinical and educational innovations in response to the VA's Action Agenda to transform VA mental health services to a recovery model. This program especially encourages (but is not limited to) proposals such as: creating, adopting, launching or expanding recovery-oriented clinical or self-help projects; new programs to educate staff, Veterans, and/or family members of Veterans about mental health recovery models; or specific recovery-oriented services/programs. For more information or to receive an application, please contact:

Alicia Lucksted, Ph.D.
MIRECC Recovery Coordinator
Www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5
410-706-3244, Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov

MONTHLY CONSULTATION SEMINAR Psychopharmacology Case Conference

First Thursday of every month

1:00 - 2:00 PM

Call 1-800-767-1750, code 79846

All VISN Clinicians are invited to attend this conference and to bring questions about a difficult or challenging psychopharmacology case. Note that the topic of the conference has been expanded from a focus only on metabolic side effects of antipsychotic medications to include all areas of psychopharmacology. The MIRECC Case Conference facilitators are Robert Buchanan, M.D., MIRECC investigator and Professor of Psychiatry at the UMB School of Medicine; Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, Ph.D., MIRECC investigator and Associate Professor in the UMB Department of Psychiatry; and Neil Sandson, M.D., inpatient attending psychiatrist in the VAMHCS and MIRECC staff member.

Upcoming Conferences and Events

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VA Social Skills Training for Serious Mental Illness

Since 2008, the VA Social Skills Training (VA-SST) program has been training VA clinicians nationwide in the delivery of SST for Veterans with serious mental illness. In March 2012, the VISN 5 MIRECC in Baltimore and the VISN 22 MIRECC in Los Angeles hosted the 17th and 18th overall workshops for the VA-SST program.

To date, the program has trained nearly 500 VA mental health clinicians in the delivery of SST. We have also trained a total of 25 Master Trainers as experts in SST, covering 16 out of the 21 VISNs.

A special thanks to Carly Hankins from the Chesapeake Health Education Program (CHEP, Inc.) for her assistance in organizing the March workshops.

For more information on Social Skills Training and the VA-SST Training program, we encourage you to visit our website:

http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/social_skills.asp

Matthew Wiley, MPH

VA Social Skills Training Program Coordinator: Matthew.Wiley@va.gov

The VISN 5 MIRECC Seeks Veterans Interested in Mental Health Issues to Join Our Veterans Advisory Panel

Advisors are volunteer Veterans who meet once a month to hear about current VISN-5 MIRECC research, educational, and clinical projects and to contribute their perspectives, opinions and suggestions as Veterans.

All interested Veterans are encouraged to join!

Be part of the discussion.

Help shape MIRECC work in the VA.

Meet other Veterans with common interests.

Good on your resume, too.

To become a MIRECC Veterans Advisory Panel (VAP) advisor, or for more information, please contact:

Alicia Lucksted, at 410-706-3244 or Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov

The MIRECC Veterans Advisory Panel is not connected to a research study.

It is an ongoing group of volunteer advisors who help the MIRECC further improve its work.





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