Meet the SC MIRECC Researcher: Michael A. Cucciare, Ph.D.

Q. Please tell us a bit about your background.

I completed a bachelor of arts in psychology at San Jose State University in 1999, and went on to complete a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno in 2006. I completed a predoctoral clinical psychology internship at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System with an emphasis on behavioral medicine. While an intern, I had the opportunity to work in a variety of medical settings including cardiology, oncology, hematology, and primary care clinics, which had a big influence on my research interests. Following my internship, I completed a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship in health services research under Dr. Ken Weingardt at the VA HSR&D Center for Health Care Evaluation at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System and Stanford University School of Medicine.

To Infinity and Beyond: What’s Next for Former SC MIRECC Fellow Juliette Mott, Ph.D.

Q. Please tell us a bit about your background.

I am a clinical psychologist specializing in trauma and PTSD. My long-time interest in trauma grew from my experience volunteering with a community organization for sexual assault survivors when I was an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame. I began staffing the crisis hotline and accompanying assault survivors to the emergency room where I helped them navigate interactions with hospital staff and law enforcement. This was my first exposure to trauma and its psychological sequelae, and I saw firsthand the need for effective trauma-focused

The Communiqué is published monthly by the South Central (VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center’s Education Core
Q. What is your area of research?
I am primarily interested in using technology to extend the reach of evidence-based mental health practices in medical settings. For example, I have worked on projects that use a desktop computer to directly administer a brief alcohol intervention (BAI) to patients during a primary care visit and most recently, to Veterans in liver clinics. I am interested in both evaluating the effectiveness of technology-delivered interventions and studying ways to improve their adoption among providers and patients. I have been greatly influenced by the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative and implementation science, which provides a framework for understanding the clinical context in which technology-based interventions are adopted.

Q. What active studies do you have going, if any?
I am very fortunate to be a part of several active projects currently underway. I was awarded a five-year VA HSR&D Career Development Award - 2 in 2009. This award has provided me with the opportunity to study the impact of computer-delivered BAIs on Veterans’ alcohol use, and to learn more about how to implement these interventions in busy medical settings such as primary care clinics. Our team just concluded a clinical trial testing the effectiveness of a self-administered BAI for Veterans in primary care. We are now conducting a follow-up study to examine whether prior treatment history for alcohol misuse impacts how Veterans respond to these interventions. My colleagues and I also recently received VA HSR&D funding to extend this work to Veterans with hepatitis C. In 2014, we plan to launch a four-year project to re-design a self-administered, computer-delivered BAI for use with Veterans with hepatitis C. This project will include studying whether this intervention reduces alcohol use in this population and factors that influence its adoption in two VA liver clinics.

Q. What are the implications or potential benefits of your research?
Computer-delivered BAIs may provide medical settings with a low-cost, high value approach for treating Veterans engaging in harmful drinking. These interventions are flexible in that they can be placed in a clinic waiting room or exam room and be completed prior to or after the Veteran meets with a clinic provider. They are also relatively low-cost both in terms of patient time needed to complete them and in terms of the resources required to integrate them into a medical clinic. Self-administered computer-delivered interventions such as BAIs may also help reduce stigma associated with disclosing alcohol use or other mental health symptoms.

Q. What person or experience had the most influence on your research career?
I feel deeply fortunate and grateful to have had the opportunity to work with many talented and generous people in my short career. I would say that working with my colleague and dear friend Dr. Ken Weingardt during my postdoctoral fellowship has had the biggest influence on my research career. While working with Ken, I developed a deep appreciation for the potential value technology can bring to mental health service delivery. He helped me understand that technology can serve many roles ranging from direct service provision to supporting providers in delivering various aspects of care. He also helped me develop a deep appreciation for implementation science and the importance of building technology-based tools in collaboration with key stakeholders.

Q. Anything else you want our readers to know about you that I haven’t asked?
My wife and I are expecting our first child this winter. I am extremely excited about becoming a father.

Q. How can people get in touch with you if they have questions about your work?
I would encourage and welcome questions, opportunities for collaboration, and further discussion. Please feel free to contact me at 501-257-1068 (VA office) or email me at michael.cucciare@va.gov. ♦
treatments. Since that time, improving care for victims of trauma has been the focus of my research and clinical work. I progressed through the Trauma Emphasis Track at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and received my Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 2010. My interest in PTSD drew me to the Houston VA for internship. While there, I observed that the VA system is truly unparalleled with respect to the breadth of its PTSD services and commitment to improving PTSD care, which solidified my desire for a VA career.

Q. In what areas of research are you interested?

My research focuses on increasing patient engagement in evidence-based psychotherapy for PTSD by enhancing treatment decision-making. I recently piloted a one-session shared decision-making intervention for Veterans with PTSD, and I am currently working to secure funding for a larger scale trial. For Veterans, the idea of starting treatment for PTSD can be extremely intimidating. Providing them with comprehensive and accurate information about their treatment options and involving them in care decisions can empower them to take this step!

Q. You recently completed the Houston MIRECC Fellowship Program. Please tell us a little about your experience in the program and how it has impacted your career.

The MIRECC fellowship offered exciting opportunities for me to integrate my background in PTSD effectiveness research within a health services context and ultimately develop my own line of research to improve PTSD treatment engagement. As a MIRECC fellow, I received incredible training in grant writing, health services and implementation research methods, and project management. It also didn’t hurt that I had an all-star mentoring team, including Drs. Jeffrey Cully, Ellen Teng, Mindi Stanley, and Rick Street. The MIRECC fellowship was a great experience for me, and I really believe that this fellowship offers the type of focused health services research training that can launch trainees toward independent VA research careers.

Q. You have accepted a position with the National Center for PTSD. When do you start and what will you be doing?

At the end of the calendar year, I will pack up and head to White River Junction, Vermont to work for the National Center for PTSD-Executive Division. I will be developing and evaluating PTSD educational products for Veterans and providers (e.g., mobile apps, web-based tools). I will also have some time to continue my own line of PTSD treatment decision-making research. Mostly, though, I will just be trying to stay warm! ♦

Upcoming CBOC Mental Health Rounds
Second Wednesdays and Thursdays Monthly
8:00-9:00 am CT; (800) 767-1750; 26461#

December 11 & 12, 2014
Sleep Disorders

January 8 & 9, 2014
Ethics

ATTRIBUTION: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF MIRECC RESEARCH SUPPORT/EMPLOYMENT

SC MIRECC researchers and educators have a responsibility to ensure that the SC MIRECC receives proper credit for SC MIRECC-supported studies or projects in articles, presentations, interviews, and other professional activities in which the results of those projects are publicized or recognized. All investigators should credit the SC MIRECC if they receive either direct or indirect support from the SC MIRECC. For example, "This work was supported in part by the VA South Central (VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center." If you receive salary support from the SC MIRECC, you should list the SC MIRECC as an affiliation.
SC MIRECC Welcomes New Employee: Kendall R. Moore, B.S.

We are pleased to welcome Kendall R. Moore to the SC MIRECC as the Administrative Officer of the Houston, Texas anchor site. Mr. Moore graduated from Chaminade University in 2002 with an associate’s degree in Liberal Arts, and Upper Iowa University in 2005 with a bachelor’s degree in Public Administration. In January 2013, he began working on a master’s degree in Business Administration at Columbia Southern University.

Mr. Moore served in the U.S. Navy as a Cryptologist from May 1987 to April 2007 in various duty stations nationally and internationally, including Florida, the District of Columbia, Alabama, Texas, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Scotland. He is a 100% service-connected disabled Veteran. After retiring from the U.S. Navy in 2007, he joined the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston. He served as the Lead Transportation Assistant in employee travel for eighteen months and a Human Resources Specialist in Employee Benefits for over three years.

Mr. Moore’s hobbies include reading books, working with electronics, and playing the drums. He has been married to his wife Renia for 26 years. They have a 15-year-old daughter, a 10-year-old son, and an 8-year-old daughter. He thoroughly enjoys every aspect of working to help fellow Veterans get quality health care and looks forward to many more years of service at VA.

CBOC Mental Health Rounds
Sponsored by the South Central MIRECC

VA Mental health providers are invited to attend the next CBOC Mental Health Rounds session titled “Recognizing Sleep Disorders: A Primer for Clinicians" on Wednesday, December 11 at 8:00-9:00 a.m. CT or Thursday, December 12 at 11:00-12:00 p.m. CT. This Microsoft Lync session will be presented by Imran S. Khawaja, M.D., FAASM. At the conclusion of this educational program, learners will be able to:

1. Recognize sleep disorders;
2. Classify sleep disorders using three simple sleep related complaints;
3. Identify symptoms and signs of major sleep disorders; and,
4. Direct the Veterans for appropriate care for sleep disorders.

Call 1-800-767-1750 and use access code 26461# to participate. Email Ashley.McDaniel@va.gov or call (501) 257-1223 for registration and continuing education credit information.
Now Available: Sexual Health Poster from LGBT Education Workgroup and Continuing Education Programs in the VA Talent Management System

A new poster to raise awareness about Veterans' sexual health needs and about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Veterans is now available on the VA LGB Education SharePoint (http://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/LGBEducation/) and the Transgender Education SharePoint (http://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/pcsclipro/trer/). These SharePoints are only accessible from a VA computer. VA employees can ask their local Medical Media department to print high quality copies of the poster.

There is also a new Assessing Sexual Health Web page on both SharePoints. Additionally, two national LiveMeeting presentations from the LGB Education Workgroup--Clinical Skill in Obtaining a History of Sexual Health Course and Quality Health Care for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Veterans Course--are now available in the VA Talent Management System (https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/login.jsp) for continuing education credit.

Pictured: Assessing Sexual Health Poster