South Central MIRECC
(VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center

Overview
The South Central MIRECC was funded in 1998 and encompasses all or parts of four states: Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The Center has anchor sites at three medical centers in Houston, Little Rock, and New Orleans. It is closely aligned with the VISN 16 Mental Health Product Line, which oversees the delivery of mental health care and the facility Mental Health Directors.

The South Central MIRECC is known for its strong educational/training programs and clinical services initiatives. In addition, the South Central MIRECC has expertise in conducting large-scale clinical trainings in evidence-based treatments and in implementing training (i.e., getting new skills into actual clinical practice). The South Central MIRECC also has a great deal of expertise in conducting health services research.

In 2007, the South Central MIRECC altered its theme to focus more on access to mental health care for rural Veterans, an important clinical priority. The South Central MIRECC is particularly well located and positioned to take on this challenge.

- VISN 16 treats more than 137,000 Veterans annually for mental health problems, compared to an average of 71,420 in other VISNs
- Almost half of VISN 16 Veterans live in rural areas
- Most VISN 16 Veterans receive their VA care at a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC)

Mission
The Center’s mission is “To promote equity in engagement, access, and quality of mental health care for Veterans facing barriers to care, especially rural Veterans.” The Center’s organizational structure includes four main components: Research, Education, Improving Clinical Care, and Research Training.

Research
South Central MIRECC investigators have extensive experience in research on rural mental health, distance delivery of mental health care via telemedicine, novel approaches to deliver mental health services in primary care settings, quality improvement interventions for older Veterans, dissemination and implementation of evidence-based practices, innovative treatment delivery for anxiety disorders, psycho-educational interventions for Veterans’ families, and exercise and mental health.

Education
CBOC clinicians nationwide participate in a monthly continuing education program led by the South Central MIRECC called the CBOC Mental Health Rounds. In addition, at the request of VISN 16 clinical leadership, the South Central MIRECC has conducted several large-scale trainings in evidence-based practices (EBPs) for providers, including training in motivational interviewing, dialectical behavior therapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy. The Center has explored various approaches to implementing and sustaining EBPs in VA clinical settings, including use of learning collaboratives and a strategy called facilitation. The Clinical Educator Grant program has produced over 40 clinical education tools by frontline clinicians. The products can be accessed for free at https://www.mirecc.va.gov/VISN16/clinicalEducationProducts.asp.
Improving Clinical Care
South Central MIRECC has worked closely with VISN 16 leadership to implement and evaluate evidence-based models of care that provide mental health treatment in primary care clinics at all eight medical centers and CBOCs (PCMHI). To improve access to VA mental health services, the Center has focused on improving access by integrating mental health and physical health services and using technology for distance delivery of mental health care in CBOCs and in the home.

Research Training
South Central MIRECC has two (2) two-year postdoctoral research fellowship programs for physicians and psychologists in Houston and Little Rock. In addition, the Training Residents in Psychiatry Scholarship (TRIPS) program is designed to attract psychiatrists (PGY-II residents) to research careers in VA. The Center periodically holds grant writing workshops to train others in successful grant writing techniques.

Selected Studies and Projects
- **A Computer Assisted Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Tool to Enhance Fidelity in CBOCs.** This project will develop and test a computer-assisted psychotherapy intervention designed to improve the technical quality of care delivered by CBOC psychotherapists.
- **Communicating Impact of mTBI on Community Reintegration through Photovoice.** This project will use community-based participatory research (CBPR) methods to engage OEF/OIF/OND Veterans with TBI and their care partners in developing photo-narratives that illuminate and convey experiences of community reintegration after TBI, including goals for recovery, sources of support, treatment preferences, and unmet needs.
- **Serving Rural Veterans Where They Live: Implementing VA Video to Home for Mental Health Treatment.** This project will train VA providers working in rural clinics to provide a wider range of mental health treatment to Veterans in their home using VA Video. The project will use facilitation implementation strategies to support the adoption of VA Video to Home into sustained practice by providers.

Selected Publications


Leadership
Director – Mark E. Kunik, MD
Co-Director – Michael R. Kauth, PhD
Associate Director for Education – Ali Abbas-Asghar-Ali, MD
Assistant Director for Education – Geri Adler, PhD
Associate Director for Research – Jeffrey M. Pyne, MD
Assistant Director for Research – Ellen P. Fischer, PhD
Associate Director for Improving Clinical Care – Tracey L. Smith, PhD
Associate Director for Research Training – Michael A. Cucciare, PhD

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