

Department of Veterans Affairs

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Engaging Multiple Stakeholders in Our Mission to Put Recovery Into Practice

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The VISN 5 MIRECC focuses on the development, evaluation and implementation of treatments and services that support recovery. We strongly believe that our work benefits from the input and contributions of key stakeholders, including Veterans and clinicians. Toward this end, we engage two advisory panels to inform the direction of our research, educational, and clinical efforts.

The first, our Veteran Advisory Panel (VAP), is comprised of Veterans who have received services at the VA and are in mental health recovery. For the last several years, this group of volunteers has been meeting monthly to advise the MIRECC on the full range of our research, clinical and educational programming. Their advice and feedback helps ensure that

our work remains Veteran focused. We currently have approximately a half dozen Veterans serving on this panel, but are always looking to grow this group of volunteers to gain fresh perspectives and add to the diverse viewpoints offered. For those interested in joining the VAP, please see notice on page 7 of this issue.

More recently we established a Clinician Advisory Panel (CAP). The CAP is open to all VA licensed independent practitioners (LIPs) and offers expert guidance to VISN 5 MIRECC personnel across our research, education and clinical cores. Our plan is to have the CAP meet 4 times a year for both general and project specific review meetings. We look forward to benefiting from clinician input regarding their perceptions about unmet



Dr. Richard Goldberg
VISN 5 MIRECC Director

needs in VA care. For those interested in joining the CAP, please see notice on page 8 of this issue.

We are confident that both the VAP and CAP will play an important role in informing the direction of future research, clinical and educational efforts at the VISN 5 MIRECC. We view these groups as our partners in helping us meet our mission of putting recovery into practice.

Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research and Training

Examples of Qualitative Research Projects at our MIRECC:

(1) Qualitative interviews with 75 Peer Specialists and their supervisors to assess barriers and facilitators to integrating Peers onto PACT teams in primary care.

(2) Interviews with 25 Veterans with serious mental illness and 10 mental health service providers to explore how these Veterans experience sleep treatments within the VHA and the successes and challenges of providing effective sleep treatments to these Veterans.

(3) Interviews with 12 Vietnam era Veterans with PTSD symptoms to examine treatment and recovery goals, expectations, and beliefs, as well as how conceptions of recovery change over time.

The qualitative and mixed methods sub-unit of the VISN 5 MIRECC Research Core is led by Amanda Peeples, Ph.D., with support from Alicia Lucksted, Ph.D. The unit's overarching goal is to provide guidance and assistance to MIRECC investigators and research staff in conducting qualitative and mixed methods data collection and analysis in support of MIRECC's current and future research activities.

Investigators at the VISN 5 MIRECC have a diverse portfolio of qualitative research projects. Many of our studies include a qualitative component to assess the feasibility and acceptability of and understand participants' experiences with a new intervention or program. Some studies are more exploratory in nature and seek to gain a better understanding of participants' beliefs and experiences around a particular diagnosis or lived experience.

The size and scope of qualitative research at the VISN

5 MIRECC varies, from small pilot studies with 10-15 qualitative interviews to larger, mixed-methods evaluation projects including up to 75 qualitative interviews alongside quantitative measures. Most of our qualitative research is interview-based, but we have also used focus groups and observational methods when appropriate. Our participants are key stakeholders for the topic under study, and have included Veterans and their family members, front-line care staff, center directors, and administrators. We have experience using a variety of analytic strategies, depending on the goals of the project. When a fast turnaround is needed, rapid analysis techniques allow us to gain an understanding of an issue quickly. For other projects, a more traditional and grounded approach to qualitative data analysis is fitting.

The sub-unit provides ongoing training and supervision to our investigators, coordinators, fellows, re-

search assistants, and peer support specialists who are involved with or interested in qualitative research. In March we held a formal qualitative interviewer training session. Training is also provided on an as-needed basis when new staff or projects come on board. In addition, we host a monthly qualitative research meeting which incorporates readings and informative discussion on topics related to qualitative data collection and analysis. We also support MIRECC research through the coordination of GSA-approved vendor contracts for transcription services, oversight of IRB- and ORD-approved procedures for data storage and transfer, assistance with protocol development, and consultation regarding data analytic support software.

Contact Amanda Peeples at Amanda.Peeples@va.gov for more information on the Qualitative and Mixed Methods Core.

Learn about Current Research Studies at the VISN 5 MIRECC

The mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC is to help Veterans “put recovery into practice”. Our research, education, and clinical programs intersect to address this mission. A number of investigators are conducting studies that are aimed at assisting Veter-

ans in identifying, planning for, and achieving their personal recovery goals. These studies are recruiting participants who receive mental health services within the VA Maryland Healthcare System. Below are descriptions of two

of them, with phone numbers to call if you or someone you know receives mental health services within the VA Maryland Healthcare System and would like to learn more.

Study 1: A Conjoint Analysis Survey to Elicit Preferences for Outcomes of Psychiatric Medication Treatment in Veterans with Serious Mental Illness

Veterans between the ages of 18-75 who have been diagnosed with Schizophrenia or Bipolar Disorder and who have been prescribed a psychiatric medication are invited to participate in a research study to help us better understand Veteran preferences when choosing medications.

You will be paid for your participation. Research will be conducted at the Baltimore and Perry Point VA.

Please call Katie Despeaux at 410-637-1431 to see if you are eligible.



Study 2: Improving Negative Symptoms & Community Engagement in Veterans with Schizophrenia

Our team is looking for veterans between the ages of 18-75 who have been diagnosed with Schizophrenia or Schizoaffective Disorder to evaluate a new intervention

aimed at improving negative symptoms. Negative symptoms include things like having low energy to do things, not feeling pleasure when doing things, and difficulty socializing with other

people. Participation includes four study interviews and group sessions that occur twice a week for 12 weeks. You will be paid for your participation.

This study is being conducted by Melanie Bennett, Ph.D. at the Baltimore, Perry Point, and DC VA Medical Centers.

Please call Kelly Lloyd at 410-637-1887 to see if you are eligible.

Publication Spotlight

Kreyenbuhl J, Record EJ, Himelhoch S, Charlotte M, Palmer-Bacon J, Dixon LB, Medoff DR, Li L. *Development and Feasibility Testing of a Smartphone Intervention to Improve Adherence to Antipsychotic Medications. Clinical Schizophrenia & Related Psychoses 2016 Jul 25. [Epub ahead of*

Approximately 60% of individuals with schizophrenia do not take their antipsychotic medications as prescribed. Non-adherence is associated with exacerbation of psychotic symptoms, increased hospital and emergency room use, and increased healthcare costs. Behavioral-tailoring strategies that incorporate medication taking into the daily routine and use environmental supports have shown promise as adherence-enhancing interventions.

We collaborated with individuals with schizophrenia and psychiatrists to develop an interactive smartphone application and web-based clinician interface, MedActive, for improving adherence to oral antipsychotic treatment. MedActive facilitates the active involvement of individuals with schizophrenia in managing their antipsychotic medication regimen by providing automated reminders for medication administration and tailored motivational feedback to encourage adherence, and by displaying user-friendly results of dai-

ly ecological momentary assessments (EMAs) of medication adherence, positive psychotic symptoms, and medication side effects for individuals and their psychiatrists.

In a 2-week open trial completed by 7 individuals with schizophrenia and their psychiatrists, MedActive was determined to be feasible and acceptable. Patient participants responded to 80% of scheduled EMAs and positively evaluated the application. Psychiatrist participants were interested in viewing the information via the clinician interface, but cited practical barriers to integrating it into their daily practice.

The VISN 5 MIRECC's Education Mission

The mission of the VA Maryland Healthcare System Capitol Health Care Network (VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC) is to support recovery and enhance community functioning of Veterans with serious mental illness. We are committed to providing outstanding training opportunities for students, advanced trainees, and professionals to contribute to the development of a cadre of researchers and clinicians who

are dedicated to the study and treatment of veterans with serious mental illness within the range of treatment settings that serve them. To support this mission, the Education Core hosts a range of educational programs that are open to clinicians and staff in VISN 5.

On July 19th, MIRECC collaborator Dr. Stephanie Sacks will be doing a webinar focused on treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder in individuals with serious mental illness. This webinar is presented

in cooperation with TMS as part of the VA National PTSD training series. The MIRECC also runs a bi-monthly Science Meeting (2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month, 12-1, at the MIRECC, VANTS 800-767-1750). This series will re-start in the Fall—dates and speakers will be provided in upcoming editions of the MIRECC Matters. If there is someone or some topic you would like to see covered, please let us know. **For more information, contact Melanie Bennett at Melanie.Bennett@va.gov.**

Comings and Goings

Research assistant Eric Crosby will be leaving our MIRECC to pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at Auburn University. Eric has worked on several studies during his time at the MIRECC. He conducted assessments for a study of an intervention to increase community engagement in Veterans

with schizophrenia and negative symptoms, and he delivered Cognitive Behavioral Treatment for Insomnia as part of a study designed to identify adaptations to this interventions for individuals who experience psychotic disorders. We wish you all the best in this next step of your training!



Monthly Psychopharmacology Case Conference

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 Medi-

cine; 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.

For more information, contact Julie Kreyenbuhl at Julie.Kreyenbuhl@va.gov.

Educational Webinar Series for Peer Specialists

The VISN 5 MIRECC hosts educational webinars for VA Peer Specialists. The next webinar is titled “EASEing Self Stigma for Veterans” and will be presented by Vonda Sykes, CPSS and Amy Drapalski, Ph.D. It is scheduled for

Tuesday, June 20th, 2:30:30 EST.

Self-Stigma is the harm caused when people start to define themselves by the stereotypes they are exposed to. It interferes greatly with wellness, recovery and treat-

ment. **EASE** is a 90 minute program that teaches staff practical ways we can help veterans we serve, reduce or avoid the effects of self-stigma. This will be a highly informative presentation, and ideal for those who want to assist Veterans, who may be struggling with self-stigma.

For more information, contact Ralf Schneider at Ralf.Schneider@va.gov

MIRECC Staff Conduct Trainings in Evidence-Based Practices for Veterans with Serious Mental Illness

At the VISN 5 MIRECC, our mission is to *put recovery into practice*. Our Clinical Core partners with clinical programs and staff at the VAMHCS, VISN, and national levels to support *recovery-oriented* and *evidence-based* clinical services for Veterans with mental illness. To support this mission, MIRECC investigators offer educational content to enrich the staff at your clinical program or provide training on an unmet clinical need. We have expertise in a range

of topics related to *mental health recovery*. Seminar topic areas include:

- Ending Self Stigma
- Promoting Community Integration
- Family and Mental Health Treatment
- Person-Centered Care
- Treating Substance Use Disorders

- Early Psychosis Services
- The Role of VA Peer Specialists and Peer-Delivered Interventions

Seminar length can be modified if needed. If you're not in VISN 5, our investigators can make presentations remotely to VA programs anywhere in the country.

For more information, contact Anjana Muralidharan at Anjana.Muralidharan2@va.gov.

Staff Training to EASE Self-Stigma Among Veterans in Recovery

Self-Stigma is the harm caused when people start to define themselves by the stereotypes they are exposed to. It interferes greatly with wellness, recovery and treatment. EASE is a 90 minute program designed to be useful to mental health staff, of all disciplines, levels, and positions, to refresh our knowledge about stigma and its harmful effects and to learn practical

strategies we can use to help the Veterans we work with be resilient in the face of common stigmatization of mental health problems.

EASE strategies employ four principles, from which it gets its name: Education, Awareness, Shifting perspective, and Empowerment.

For more information and to access EASE training materials so you can deliver EASE yourself, go to <http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/ease.asp> or contact the EASE Team at EASETeam@va.gov.

Learn about the Post-doctoral Fellowship at the VISN 5 MIRECC

The VA Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment at the VISN 5 MIRECC has one open post-doctoral psychologist fellowship position and one open post-residency psychiatrist fellowship position to begin in September, 2017. The goal of these two-year fellowships is to train psychologists and psychiatrists to become leading clinical researchers in the area of serious mental illness. Fellows develop independent programs of

research on topics related to psychosocial treatment development and implementation of recovery-oriented services and engage in supervised clinical training, delivering clinical services in settings that serve Veterans with serious mental illness. Detailed information about the VA Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment at the VISN 5 MIRECC can be

found on the national MIRECC website at <http://www.mirecc.va.gov/mirecc-fellowship.asp> and at the VISN 5 website at <http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/>. **Potential applicants are encouraged to contact Dr. Melanie Bennett at Melanie.Bennett@va.gov to discuss details of the opportunities available for fellows.**

Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program

The VISN 5 MIRECC offers a small grant mechanism to fund recovery-oriented clinical and educational innovations within VISN 5 in response to the VA’s Action Agenda to transform VA mental health services to a recovery model. The program especially encourages (but is not limited to) proposals such as: creating, adopting, launching or ex-

panding 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. Past grants have been used by clinicians and peer specialists to attend trainings, bring in speakers, start new programs, and support crea-

tive activities that promote mental health recovery.

We will work with you to develop your application. Apply today! Grant amount can range from \$300-\$5000.

Application Deadlines are the 1st of March, June, and December.

For more information or to receive an application, please contact Alicia Lucksted, Ph.D., MIRECC Recovery Coordinator, at 410-706-3244 or email her at Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov.

Join our Veterans Advisory Panel

To become a MIRECC Veterans Advisory Panel (VAP) advisor, or for more information, please contact Ralf Schneider, at 410-637-1874 or email him at Ralf.Schneider@va.gov.

The VISN 5 MIRECC seeks Veterans interested in mental health issues to join our Veterans Advisory Panel. Advisors are volunteers, who have a history of mental health diagnosis and recovery. They meet once a month to hear about current VISN-5 MIRECC research, educational, and clinical

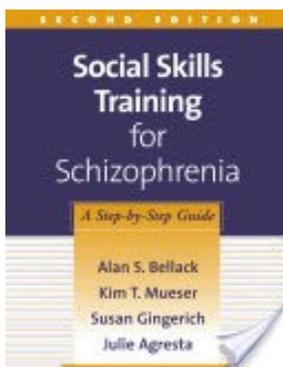
projects and to contribute their perspectives, opinions and suggestions as Veterans. All interested Veterans are encouraged to join!

- Be part of the discussion.
- Help shape MIRECC work in the VA.
- Meet other Veterans with common interests.

- Good on your resume, too.

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.

VA Social Skills Training



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. Over the years, the VA-SST program has trained over 800 VA staff across the coun-

try, including 53 Peer Specialists, 48 Master Trainers, and 216 fellows.

Trainings are scheduled by region. **For more information on Social Skills Training, the VA-SST Training program, and upcoming train-**

ings, please visit our website: http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/social_skills.asp or email Elizabeth Gilbert, Ph.D. at Elizabeth.Gilbert@va.gov.



Using Mindfulness in Clinical Practice: Consultation Call

Research shows that practicing mindfulness is associated with improved emotional and physical well-being, and that integrating mindfulness into clinical care can improve mental health outcomes. On May 10, 2017, the VISN 5 MIRECC hosted a workshop entitled, *Mindfulness Strategies for Use in Mental Health Practice*. Thanks to our planners, presenters, trainers, panelists,

and attendees for helping us make this workshop a success!

To continue our efforts on this topic, the VISN 5 MIRECC will host a twice-monthly consultation call. Our workshop trainers, who are mental health providers skilled in mindfulness practice, will teach new techniques, answer your questions, and provide practical strategies to apply mindfulness in your daily life and clinical practice.

Upcoming calls will take place on the following dates:

- Wednesday June 21 at 2 PM
- Monday July 3 at 11 AM
- Wednesday July 19 at 2 PM
- Monday August 7 at 11 AM

Call in using VANTS: 1-800-767-1750, access code 29166#. **Contact Anjana Muralidharan for more information:** Anjana.muralidharan2@va.gov.

Join the VISN 5 MIRECC Clinician Advisory Panel

The Clinician Advisory Panel (CAP) is a group of VA clinicians who serve as expert advisors to VISN 5 MIRECC investigators. The CAP helps identify emerging needs in VA care, critique developing interventions, and provide feedback on feasibility of proposed studies. The CAP meets quarterly, twice per

year for general meetings and twice for project review. CAP members can attend in person at the Baltimore Annex or via VANTS.

General meeting: All CAP members are invited to share their views about unmet needs in VA care and underserved Veteran populations. These meetings inform the

direction of future VA research.

Project review meeting: CAP members are selected based on their areas of expertise to review developing research projects and provide feedback. These meetings inform the development and execution of specific research projects.

All VA licensed independent practitioners are invited to join the CAP. We encourage members to list their CAP membership on their resumes and report it on their performance evaluations.

To join, please complete the CAP Expert Advisor Application, available on our website, or contact Samantha Hack (Samatha.Hack@va.gov) for

Opportunities to Partner with the VISN 5 MIRECC Clinical Core

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examples include clinical consultation (provide support to staff who want to improve the services they offer to Veterans); training in evidence-based, recovery-oriented interventions (such as Social Skills Training and Wellness Recovery Action Planning); clinical demon-

stration projects of innovative services (partner with programs to pilot test innovative tools and services); direct clinical service and supervision (provided by MIRECC investigators and fellows) and needs assessment/program evaluation (assist programs in identifying service gaps or needs and generating ideas

for new programs).

Contact us for more information:

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(Amy.drapalski@va.gov)

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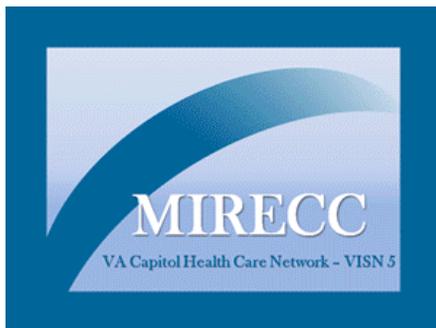
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Putting Recovery Into Practice



**MIRECC Matters is also
available online:**

www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/

