

THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

An Electronic Publication of the VA Capitol Health Care Network
(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center

April 18, 2005 Volume 6, No. 2

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MOVE! Weight Management and Physical Activity Intervention for Seriously Mentally Ill Veterans

Submitted by Richard Goldberg, PhD

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the U.S. and is regarded as a major public health challenge to the VA system, as it increases the risk of medical disorders and death. It is well documented that rates of obesity and related co-occurring medical diseases, such as Type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, are significantly elevated in veterans living with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses (SMI) and that these patients have a shortened life-span. But while evidence-based weight loss programs exist for the general population, their effectiveness with people living with SMI has not been well researched.

The VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention is pilot testing a weight management and physical activity program entitled **MOVE! (Managing Overweight/Obesity for Veterans Everywhere)**. Trials of the program are currently being conducted in over 16 VA facilities, including Baltimore's Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC). Given the urgent need to develop effective weight loss interventions for veterans with SMI, the MIRECC recently partnered with the GRECC to test the feasibility and efficacy of this program with overweight or obese veterans receiving outpatient mental health services.

MOVE! makes use of existing evidence-based techniques and materials that can be adapted for use in a variety of ambulatory care settings. The program provides a standardized format for offering weight management and physical activity evaluation and related intervention, is in manual form for easy implementation. The **MOVE!** modules can be tailored for individual differences in medical status, age, ethnicity, and readiness to engage in new weight management and physical activity behaviors. **Richard Goldberg, PhD**, Associate Director of the MIRECC Clinical Core, is the principal investigator for this study, which began recruitment in early April 2005. He is also pursuing VA MERIT funding to test a full-scale randomized trial of the effectiveness of using **MOVE!** with SMI veterans. For more information, please contact Dr. Goldberg at 410-706-2490 or rgoldber@psych.umaryland.edu.

HIV INFECTION AMONG MENTALLY ILL VETERANS

*Submitted by Seth Himelhoch, MD, MPH**

Recent studies using large urban populations have reported the rate of positive HIV tests among persons with serious mental illness (SMI) to be between three to eight times greater than the general population. Although national estimates exist regarding depression in HIV clinic populations, there are no national estimates of the prevalence of HIV among those with SMI. Whether similar racial, ethnic, and gender

disparities that exist in the general population are true for individuals with SMI is largely unknown. Furthermore, people with SMI are known to have higher rates of medical morbidity and mortality than persons without mental illness and are consistently reported to have difficulties accessing high-quality medical services. Because highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) has revolutionized the treatment of HIV leading to significant declines in HIV related morbidity and mortality, poor access to HIV medical care can lead to increased morbidity, increased reliance on costly acute medical care services (e.g. inpatient hospitalization) and poor survival. Whether individuals with SMI and HIV are accessing HIV care is also largely unknown.

In collaboration with Dr. Fred Blow at the VA Serious Mental Illness Treatment Research and Evaluation Center (SMITREC) and the University of Michigan, we will use data from the VA psychosis registry to investigate questions regarding rates of HIV infection among veterans with SMI as compared to the general VA population, as well as to better understand service utilization of HIV related medical services and clinical outcomes of HIV care. Common co-occurring conditions related to HIV such as substance use and Hepatitis C will also be investigated.

* Dr. Himelhoch is currently the Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services at the University of Maryland School of Medicine's infectious diseases clinic. His research focuses on access to care and treatment outcomes among HIV+ individuals with co-occurring psychiatric and substance use disorders.

CONGRATS ARE IN ORDER!

Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD, has received a Young Investigator Award from the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression (NARSAD). Her project, *Adherence to Medications for Type 2 Diabetes Among Patients with Schizophrenia*, will investigate

whether patients with schizophrenia exhibit differential rates of adherence to medications for diabetes compared to patients without a psychiatric disorder, and whether patients with schizophrenia exhibit differential rates of adherence to medications for diabetes compared to antipsychotic medications. This study will provide insight into the personal health economy with which patients manage two or more illnesses, with the potential to shed light on how patients value health outcomes and regard health risks. In addition, two complementary studies using different patient populations and methods of assessing medication adherence will address the same aims. The first study will use administrative encounter data to measure medication adherence using pharmacy refill data for a nationwide sample of veterans. The second study will build upon a previous study of Type 2 diabetes in schizophrenia conducted at the University of Maryland. Adherence to medications will be assessed by patient self-report and the Medication Management Ability Assessment, a performance-based measure of general medication adherence involving a brief role-play task. The results of these studies will help inform the development of interventions designed to improve medication adherence and subsequent health outcomes for patients with schizophrenia.

Aaron Murray-Swank, PhD, was recently awarded a third year extension in the MIRECC Special Fellowship Program in Psychiatry and Advanced Psychology. This award will allow Aaron to continue his innovative research, which includes providing family psychoeducation to veterans with schizophrenia and their families, as well as the role of spirituality among patients with schizophrenia and their family caregivers.

The **Maryland Psychiatric Research Center (MPRC)** has been selected by the National Institute of Mental Health to take over publication of *Schizophrenia Bulletin* (the *Bulletin*). Effective January 2005, the *Bulletin* is co-owned and published by the MPRC and Oxford Journals. The *Bulletin* has become a

leading resource that has helped shape and promote research on schizophrenia since its first issue in 1969. The *Bulletin's* new Editor-in-Chief will be MPRC's Director and MIRECC investigator, **William T. Carpenter, Jr., MD**, one of the most-cited schizophrenia researchers of the past decade.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Family Support and Education Program

April 23, 2005
10:00 – 11:30 AM
Baltimore VA Medical Center, Room 2B-136

The Family Support and Education Program is a monthly program for family members of veterans with serious mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression. The program is designed to help families support veterans' treatment and recovery, as well as assist family members and other caregivers as they cope with the effects of mental illness on the family. Group meetings are held one Saturday a month at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, and involve presentation of information and discussion, which is adapted to the needs of family members and veterans who attend.

To register for the workshop, or if you have any questions about the program, please contact Dr. Aaron Murray-Swank by phone: (410) 605-7000, ext. 4756, or email: aaron.murray-swank@med.va.gov.

NAMI WALKS for the Mind of America

Third annual fund-raising walk for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

May 1, 2005
Centennial Park, Ellicott City, MD
Check-in: 10:00 am
Start Time: 11:00 am

To participate with or donate to Team MIRECC, contact Shannon Thomas-Lohrman at 410-605-7000, ext 4733 or shannon.thomas-lohrman@med.va.gov. For more information about NAMI, contact Dana Lefko at 410-863-0470 or dmlefko@aol.com, or visit www.nami.org.

Understanding and Treating PTSD in Women

May 16, 2005

7:30 AM – 4:30 PM
Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel, Baltimore

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is twice as common in women as it is in men, although this gender difference is not fully understood. This day long conference will bring together experts from around the country, including the VA's National Center for PTSD, to discuss the latest developments in the treatment of civilian and military-related PTSD in women. Problems of co-morbid PTSD and physical illness or substance use disorders in women will be addressed.

For more information, please contact Kim Gordley, Chesapeake Health Education Program (CHEP), at kim.gordley@med.va.gov, or (410) 642-2411 x5403. Or, you can register on-line at <http://www.chepinc.org/conf.shtml>. **Hurry! Early discounted registration ends April 25, 2005!**

National MIRECC Conference

June 5-8, 2005
New Orleans, Louisiana

This second national MIRECC conference is designed to:

1. Disseminate evidence-based research about suicide assessment, dual diagnosis, and treating new veterans as mandated by the New Freedom Commission;
2. Discuss relevant MIRECC research in these areas and promote collaboration among MIRECCs and co-sponsors (e.g., American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Readjustment Counseling Service, Department of Defense, MH QUERI, etc.);
3. Promote development of effective clinical techniques among providers; and
4. Provide additional training and professional development for MIRECC Fellows.

For more information, please contact Michael R. Kauth, PhD, Co-Director for Education, South Central (VISN 16) MIRECC, at michael.kauth@med.va.gov.
