

# THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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## MHICM VETERANS EXPAND THEIR CULTURAL HORIZONS

*Submitted by Alicia Lucksted, PhD*

In 2006, a VISN 5 MIRECC Small Grant Program award was issued to Kellyanne Gibson, LGSW, to start a new rehabilitation and social skills practice group at the Baltimore VAMC. She proposed the group in order to give Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM) veterans the opportunity to explore new leisure and cultural activities. The pilot project has now come to an end, but the group has been integrated into the MHICM program and is continuing.

The group meets twice per month, first to identify and plan a new cultural or leisure activity they would like to try, and then to participate in the activity. At first, some veterans found it hard to integrate the new outings into their usual routine, but with time most did so. Participation has averaged around 12 people, with much enthusiasm. Ms. Gibson noted that camaraderie has developed among the regularly-participating veterans, which is new and exciting to see. She said, "They look out for each other in ways they never did before, because they've been interacting with each other rather than just seeing each other waiting for appointments".

The MHICM staff hoped that in addition to the enjoyment and learning that occurs with each activity, the group would demonstrate to other veterans that it's possible and enriching to try

new things in the community. One measure of this is that by the end of the pilot group, most participating veterans wanted to continue the group, even though they would have to invest their own time and money to keep it going. In addition to the benefits the MHICM veterans gain from the group, Ms. Gibson noted that it is good for staff and the public to see that "veterans with a serious mental illness have real interests in culture and community, which are often ignored. They do want to learn, see, participate and not just have a narrow life". Staff are now working to foster development of group leadership so that the group can begin the transformation to become completely veteran-led.

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## YOU CAN'T MISS THIS ONE!

"In Our Own Voice: Living with Mental Illness" will be presented at the Perry Point VAMC Auditorium on Thursday, May 3, 2007 from 10-11:30 AM. "In Our Own Voice" is a unique, recovery-oriented outreach program developed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness. It demonstrates how people with serious mental illnesses cope with the realities of their disorders while recovering and reclaiming productive lives. The presenters are consumers who bravely share their personal journeys with mental illness through the dark days and the successes. Consumers, families, mental health service providers, nurses, educators, students and anyone wanting to learn more about mental illness are all invited to attend. If you need further information, please

contact Cindy Clark at [Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov](mailto:Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov) or (410) 605-7298.

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## MIRECC IN JAMA

In February 2007, the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) published an article entitled, "Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment for PTSD in Women - A Randomized Controlled Trial". We are proud to note that the VISN 5 MIRECC/VAMHCS was one of the 12 sites throughout the country who participated in this VA Cooperative study. The study compared the efficacy of prolonged exposure and present centered therapy in the treatment of post traumatic stress disorder in women veterans. Site Principal Investigator Sonja Batten, PhD, led a team of study therapists that included: Wendy Tenhula, PhD; Amanda Dutton, LCSW-C; Stacey Jones, LCSW-C; Lorie Morris, PsyD; and Alexis Nusbaum, PhD. The Baltimore VA site collected assessment and treatment data on 17 participants. For the entire article, see Vol. 297 No. 8, February 28, 2007 at [jama.com](http://jama.com).

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## PRESENT YOUR CASE

VAMHCS clinicians - do you have a complex case involving second generation antipsychotics (SGA)? You are encouraged to bring them to the monthly SGA Consultation Seminar (see Upcoming Events for the details). Presentations are informal - just show up (or call in) and talk!

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## UNDERSTANDING TREATMENT STUDY DROP-OUT AND RETENTION

*Submitted by Debbie Gioia, PhD*

Debbie Gioia, PhD, from the School of Social Work at UMB, will soon start data collection to explore the reasons for retention and drop-out of participants in the Behavioral Treatment for Drug Abuse in SPMI Patients study (PI: Alan Bellack, PhD). Dr. Bellack's study, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, is examining a multifaceted treatment for substance abuse in

patients with serious and persistent mental illness and is being conducted at the Baltimore and Perry Point VAMCs, the Walter P. Carter Center, and various community sites.

Dr. Gioia, with the assistance of social work graduate students, will interview approximately 15 subjects from each of the three randomized conditions of the study. Locating participants who dropped out during the treatment phase will be a challenge, but extra effort will be expended to try and connect with them. Since the NIDA study is mainly concerned with participant engagement in treatment, it will be useful to understand the dimensions, other than group conditions, that may be affecting participation. The differences in diagnosis, veteran/non-veteran status, and other life contingencies will be more completely understood through the interview process.

The addition of qualitative research methods to the midpoint of the study should have a profound impact in understanding the processes and outcomes of the study. In effect, it will convert a quantitative study into a mixed method study, enriching the data so that the quantitative and qualitative data can be looked at in combination. It also makes for a novel design and it will be interesting to pay attention to the process of adding this layer of inquiry. Finally, since Dr. Gioia is new to Baltimore, it affords a wonderful opportunity to begin a new research partnership with seasoned local researchers.

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## CONGRATS ARE IN ORDER!

Monica Mann, M.A., a graduate student in clinical psychology at the University of Maryland, College Park, has been awarded a pre-doctoral research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct her dissertation research in the MIRECC Clinical Psychophysiology Lab. The study will examine brain activity that occurs when people execute erroneous responses. This activity, called the Error-Related Negativity (ERN), is thought to be related to self-monitoring and likely reflects

phasic activity in the dopamine system. In previous studies, the ERN has been observed to be reduced in individuals with schizophrenia. Ms. Mann will examine the ERN while participants with schizophrenia and healthy comparison participants do a computerized task and also while they watch someone else do the task. In studies of non-psychiatric subjects, an ERN has been observed when someone watches another person make an error. This is thought to reflect the activity of the “mirror neuron” system and may serve as the mechanism that allows for observational learning. To our knowledge, this will be the first study to examine the observation ERN in schizophrenia patients. Ms. Mann plans to examine whether the size of the ERN generated while observing another person is related to measures of social functioning, theory of mind abilities (i.e., reasoning about other people’s thoughts, knowledge and intentions), and performance on cognitive measures. Ms. Mann’s graduate advisor is Jack Blanchard, PhD, and Sarah Morris, PhD, will be advising her in her work in the psychophysiology lab.

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## GOOD-BYE AND THANKS

We regretfully say good-bye to Aaron Murray-Swank, PhD, who is leaving us for the Denver VA Medical Center, where he will be a psychologist in the Outpatient Mental Health Clinic. Aaron joined us in August, 2003 as our first MIRECC Fellow in Advanced Psychology. His research and clinical work has focused on how to successfully involve families in the treatment of veterans with serious mental illness as well as the role of spirituality in coping with serious mental illness. At the Denver VA, he will be providing psychological services and developing programs to meet the needs of veterans living with mental illness. We want to thank him for his many contributions to the MIRECC and wish him all the best as he begins this new venture.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **2007 NAMI Walks for the Mind of America**

Annual fund raising event for the National Alliance on Mental Illness

Sunday, April 29, 2007

Centennial Park in Ellicott City, MD

Check-in: 10:00 AM

Start Time: 11:00 AM

For more information, visit the NAMI website at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

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### **Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar**

First Thursday of every month:

May 3, 2007

June 7, 2007

1:00 - 2:00 PM

MIRECC conference room, BVA (6A-168)

or PPVA VTel conference room, Bldg 364

or call 800-767-1750, code 79846

There has been increasing concern, both within and outside of the VA, about the metabolic side effects of second generation antipsychotic medications (SGAs). VAMHCS clinicians are encouraged to bring their difficult or complicated SGA cases to this seminar for consultation and advice. Anyone can present a case or just ask questions in this informal setting, so please join us as we learn from the consultants and from each other. The consultants are **Robert Buchanan, MD**, from the MIRECC Psychopharmacology Clinic and Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, and **Julie Kreyenbuhl, PhD, PharmD** from the MIRECC.

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### **"In Our Own Voice: Living with Mental Illness"**

May 3, 2007  
10-11:30 AM  
Perry Point VAMC Auditorium

A unique, recovery-oriented outreach program developed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness and presented by consumers. Please see article in this newsletter for details. For further information, contact Cindy Clark at [Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov](mailto:Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov) or (410) 605-7298.

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### **Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program Application Deadline**

June 1, 2007

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, or launching new recovery-oriented clinical, self-help, or related projects (or expanding existing ones to reach more veterans), new programs to educate staff, veterans, and/or family members of veterans about mental health recovery models, or specific recovery-oriented services/programs. Please see the article in this newsletter for an example of an innovative program that was funded by one of these grants.

For more information, or to receive an application, please contact Alicia Lucksted, PhD, MIRECC Recovery Coordinator, at [Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov](mailto:Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov), 410-605-7451 or 410-706-3244.

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### **NATIONAL MIRECC CONFERENCE**

#### **Transforming VHA Mental Health Care: Promoting Recovery and Integrated Care**

A comprehensive mental health conference sponsored by the MIRECCs and Best Practices in Mental Health

July 17-20, 2007  
Hilton Alexandria Mark Center  
Alexandria, VA

This conference will focus on the diverse clinical, research and educational initiatives related to VHA's Mental Health Strategic Plan, and how the initiatives can be best implemented and monitored in their networks, local medical centers and the Veteran Readjustment Centers. In addition, the conference will focus on increasing recovery oriented services, integrating care, promoting a national model for suicide risk identification and prevention, and increasing accountability for the effective utilization of mental health enhancement funding. The conference will enhance the promotion of family psycho-education models and increased utilization of peer-to-peer support services. Finally, the conference will foster collaboration among researchers, clinicians and educators, thus increasing the opportunities for new VA research while enhancing opportunities for psychiatry and psychology fellows.

For more information, visit [www.mirecc.va.gov/conference-2007.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/conference-2007.asp)

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### **Schizophrenia and Other Mental Illnesses: Involving the Family, Improving Care**

This one hour, three-part (20 minutes each) DVD program highlights the importance of including families in the treatment of patients with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. This program is highly recommended for families, patients, clinicians, policy makers and the general public. For a copy, contact Fran Broomall at [fran.broomall@va.gov](mailto:fran.broomall@va.gov) or 410-605-7000, x 4740.

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT  
<http://www.va.gov/VISN5mirecc>