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# MIRECC MATTERS

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(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC)

## 2008 Advisory Board Meeting

*Submitted by Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP*

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The VISN 5 MIRECC Advisory Board meeting convened this year on November 3rd. While it is an “annual” event, we did not convene the Advisory Board last year since we had our External Review last Fall. Consequently, we used this opportunity to provide a report on the External evaluation along with a broad overview of what we have accomplished over the past two years. The 2008 Board consisted of:

- Frederic Blow, PhD, Director, Serious Mental Illness Treatment Research Center, Ann Arbor VAMC
- Stephen Maisto, PhD, Director, Integrated Health Center of Excellence, Albany VAMC
- Miklos Losonczy, MD, COS Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences, VA New Jersey Health Care System
- Greer Sullivan, MD, Director, VISN 16 South Central MIRECC
- David Oslin, MD, Director, VISN 4 MIRECC
- Constance Walker, CAPT, USN (Ret), President, NAMI Southern Maryland

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## MIRECC Launches Studies at DC VAMC

*Submitted by Lynnae Hamilton, PhD & Julia Evelly, MS*

We recently launched two MIRECC clinical trials at the Washington DC VA Medical Center: *The Behavioral Treatment for Drug Abuse in SPMI Patients* (Behavioral Treatment; PI: Dr. Alan S. Bellack), and *Managing Obesity for Veteran’s Everywhere!* (MOVE!; PI: Richard Goldberg, PhD). The Behavioral Treatment study investigates a psychosocial treatment for patients dually-diagnosed with serious mental illness (SMI) and substance abuse, while MOVE! is a 6-month trial investigating an intervention optimized for veterans who have SMI and difficulty with weight management. These studies join Dr. Wendy Tenhula’s *Maryland Program for Vocational Effectiveness* (MPROVE) trial, which has been successfully underway since October, 2005.

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Ira Katz, MD, Director, Mental Health Services, VACO, also attended, and Stephen Marder, MD, Director, VISN 22 MIRECC, participated by phone.



In previous Advisory Board meetings we have devoted the morning and early afternoon to a review of our research portfolio, and have had to condense presentations of our Education and Clinical activities. In light of the recent announcement of the Uniform Mental Health Services Package (USP), however, we flipped the order of presentations to cover Education and Clinical activities first, and organized the presentations around the content of the USP. A key theme was our *value added*: how we have leveraged our core resources and improved services for veterans. Drs. Paul Ruskin (Clinical Core) and Richard Goldberg (Education Core) provided an integrated overview of our portfolio and introduced speakers, including Alicia Lucksted, PhD, who presented on our recovery programs and Neil Sandson, MD, who described his consultation service on drug-drug interactions. For the first time, we also had presentations on our training programs. Sarah Morris, PhD, the new Director of the Psychology Pre-doctoral Internship Consortium described that program, and Jack Blanchard, PhD, covered our collaborations with the graduate program at the Department of Psychology at University of Maryland, College Park. Alan S. Bellack, PhD, and Richard Goldberg, PhD, then described our VA-Psychosocial Rehabilitation Training program and our work as the Hub Site for the VA Psychosocial Rehabilitation Fellowship.

The afternoon was devoted to our research portfolio. Lisa Dixon, MD, MPH, Associate Director of the Research Core, illustrated the high level of collaborations among our cadre of investigators, and the way collaborations have a seminal effect in developing creative, integrative projects. This was followed by brief presentations of select projects and programs by Eric Slade, PhD, Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD, and Robert Buchanan, MD.

The day concluded with an Executive session in which Board members provided feedback on both specific programs and the overall focus of our work. I am pleased to report that their feedback was uniformly positive. They were highly complimentary about the volume of our activities and the quality of our work. Of note, they were enthusiastic about the *value added* of our activities and the extent to which we have been able to impact on service delivery in VISN 5. In addition, Dr. Katz was very enthusiastic about the organization of our presentation and the extent to which we have been able to address the USP.

Special thanks to MIRECC staff Mary Lupi and Fran Broomall for working hard to make this year's Board Meeting a success.

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Currently, Behavioral Treatment therapists are conducting biweekly substance abuse treatment groups while ramping up to begin the control condition in early December. Nine veterans have been recruited for the study. To date, six veterans have signed informed consent for MOVE! and preparations for the first sessions are underway.

Partnership with the Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Program (SARP) and the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Care (PRRC) units have been instrumental in launching these studies in DC. Additionally, MIRECC researchers have notable support from Associate Chief of Staff for Mental Health, Stephen Deutsch, MD, PhD, and Richard Rosse, MD, Chief of Psychiatry. Their leadership has fostered contact with department managers and their teams, resulting in numerous referrals from across the VA Mental Health Service Line.

In early 2009, MIRECC staff members look forward to adding another study: *Cognition in Schizophrenia Patients With and Without Diabetes* (PI: Dwight Dickinson, PhD), to the roster of studies conducted at the DC VAMC.

MIRECC research staff at the DC VAMC include: Wendy Tenhula, PhD, Investigator and MIRECC Coordinator; Julia Evely, MS, Study therapist/Coordinator; Joe Hassell, MA, Assessor; Lynnae Hamilton, PhD, Study therapist/Coordinator; and Ellen Kahn-Greene, MA, Study therapist. For more information about the studies, or to contact the MIRECC staff, call 888-553-0242, x 5494, or email Lynnae Hamilton at [lynnae.hamilton@va.gov](mailto:lynnae.hamilton@va.gov).

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Our DC research staff:

Wendy Tenhula

Julia Evely

Joe Hassell

Lynnae Hamilton

Ellen Kahn-Greene

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## Welcome to New MIRECC Staff

**Marlon Tinker, LGSW, CAC-AD**, recently joined the MIRECC as a Research Assistant. Marlon received his Master's degree in Social Work from San Francisco State University in 1999 and most recently worked as a counselor and administrator for the Alcohol & Drug Recovery outpatient substance abuse treatment center. He will serve as a recruiter and therapist for Dr. Bellack's dual diagnosis treatment study and Dr. Bennett's smoking cessation trial.



## CONFERENCE UPDATE

### MIRECC Participates in ABCT Annual Meeting

*Submitted by Melanie Bennett, PhD*

This November, several investigators at the MIRECC presented their work at the annual meeting of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies in Orlando, Florida as part of a symposium titled "Novel Cognitive Behavioral Interventions to Improve Physical Health in Persons With Serious Mental Illness". Melanie Bennett, PhD, Richard Goldberg, PhD, and Wendy Tenhula, PhD, presented research and MIRECC Director Alan S. Bellack, PhD, served as the discussant.

Dr. Bennett presented work on development of a novel intervention for smoking cessation designed for people with serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI), including a review of the treatment development process and preliminary data from a MIRECC-funded pilot study of 17 people with schizophrenia who smoke. Dr. Goldberg presented his work which adapted the VA weight management intervention MOVE! (Managing Obesity/Overweight for Veterans Everywhere!) for people with SPMI, and included a comprehensive review of the impact of obesity for this group of consumers. Dr. Tenhula presented work on the development of a program to teach skills for self-management of chronic physical diseases to people with SPMI, including strategies for communicating with medical providers, symptom management, medication management, and creating personal health records. Following the presentations, Dr. Bellack discussed the critical need to improve physical health in people with serious mental illness, and how behavioral skills building strategies that teach consumers ways to manage health care and participate in health decision making contribute to goals of recovery and improved quality of life.

### Another Successful Family Conference

*Submitted by Cynthia Clark, RN, C, CD*

On Saturday, October 25, 2008, the MIRECC and mental health staff at the Perry Point VA Medical Center held another successful conference for veterans with mental illness and their families. "Living Healthy/Living Well" focused on issues of co-morbidity and wellness strategies. Presenters included Lisa Dixon MD, Richard Goldberg PhD, and Don Thomas RNC, M Ac. Two veteran consumers also talked about their recovery and personal issues with their mental and physical health.

After the half-day conference, participants ate lunch and gathered health and wellness literature from resources within the VA and the surrounding communities of Harford and Cecil Counties. Responses from the 70 participants who attended were very positive. We hope to present similar events on a yearly basis.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

## ◆ Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar ◆

First Thursday of every month:

(No seminar in January, 2009)

February 5, 2009

1:00 - 2:00 PM

MIRECC conference room, BVA (6A-168)

or PPVA VTel conference room, Bldg 364 (C-110)

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.

## ◆ Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program ◆

Application Deadline: March 1, 2009

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, launching or expanding 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.

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), 410-706-3244.

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<http://www.va.gov/VISN5mirecc>