

THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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OOOPS, YOU DID IT AGAIN! (A Study of Error-Related Brain Activity)

Submitted by Sarah Morris, PhD

Several MIRECC investigators have a long-standing interest in the measurement and teaching of social skills in individuals with psychiatric illness. A study currently underway in the MIRECC Clinical Psychophysiology Lab will bring a new set of tools to help us understand the neural mechanisms that might contribute to functioning in social situations. In this study, funded by an individual National Research Service Award from the National Institute of Mental Health awarded to College Park clinical psychology doctoral student Monica Mann, brain activity will be recorded while individuals with schizophrenia and psychiatrically healthy comparison participants observe another person making errors on a computerized task. Previous studies of brain activity related to detecting one's own errors have shown that an area of the brain called the anterior cingulate cortex emits a burst of activity immediately after an error is made. This activity is present regardless of whether errors are made with the hands or feet or eyes, and regardless of the specific type of task that is being performed, and is thought to reflect the operation of a generic self-monitoring or error-detection system that allows us to engage in ongoing monitoring of the adequacy and appropriateness of our actions. Several studies have documented

reduced error-related brain activity in schizophrenia.

More recently, neuroscientists have discovered that this error-related brain activity also occurs when people watch other people make errors, suggesting a mechanism by which we learn from watching others, and a possible building block for interpersonal understanding. Ms. Mann's study will compare this observation-related brain activity in schizophrenia patients and healthy controls and will examine whether participants' brain activity, elicited when observing an error, is related to their ability to reason about other people's thinking and emotions (referred to as "theory of mind" reasoning) and self-report measures of social functioning.

This work is part of a larger initiative to examine learning and reward processing using psychophysiological methods. In a related study in which participants learned stimulus-response pairs by getting feedback following each response, brain activity following error feedback was diminished in schizophrenia patients compared to healthy comparison subjects, especially in patients with negative symptoms, suggesting disruption of sensitivity to environmental cues indicating the state of ongoing events. These results will soon be published in the journal *Schizophrenia Research*. Follow-up studies are underway to determine whether this pattern of diminished feedback-related brain activity is observed in different types of cognitive tasks.

NEW BEHAVIORAL HEALTH LAB

Submitted by Frances Webb, RN

We are pleased to announce the formation of the Behavioral Health Lab (BHL), a new program within the Mental Health Clinical Center, VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS). The Lab is modeled after a VISN 4 MIRECC program developed by Dr. David Oslin. The VISN 5 MIRECC has been instrumental in bringing the Behavioral Health Lab model to the VAMHCS.

The BHL is a dynamic, evidence-based clinical service designed to help manage the mental health needs of patients in the Primary Care Clinic. The BHL provides a clinical tool to triage patients into the appropriate level of mental health care and offers assessment, early intervention, monitoring, and disease and referral management for mental health and substance abuse symptoms. The BHL performs an initial comprehensive structured telephone interview (Core Assessment) which gives primary providers an assessment of a patient's mental health and substance abuse problems, along with recommendations for care. There is also an option for structured follow-up assessments and disease management when requested. The BHL should result in a reduction in no-show rates and waiting times, and lead to more appropriate placement in specialized care.

The VAMHCS BHL team consists of Dr David Barrett, Medical Director, Deborah Lessman, RN, and Frances Webb, RN, Behavioral Health Specialists, and Brandy Webb, Program Support Assistant. Two psychology technicians are also being recruited for the team.

WELCOME TO NEW MIRECC STAFF

Matthew T. Wiley, BA, comes to the MIRECC from the Durham, North Carolina, VA Medical Center (DVAMC), where he served as Laboratory Manager for the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Nicotine Research Laboratory at the DVAMC and Duke University. With the MIRECC, he will serve as the Program Coordinator for the VA Psychosocial Rehabilitation Training Program (VA-PRT). The VA-PRT will provide training, technical support and consultation in evidence-based psychosocial interventions, VA-wide, to mental health staff and program leaders working with seriously mentally ill veterans and their families. Matt is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A've Childrey, MSW, recently joined the MIRECC as a Research Assistant. A've received her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Michigan in 2003. She worked for Johns Hopkins University as coordinator for a multi-site maternal opioid treatment project, and has worked as a substance abuse therapist with adolescent girls in addition to various drug abuse research projects. She will serve as a recruiter and therapist for Dr. Bellack's dual diagnosis treatment study, and will be based at the Perry Point VAMC.

Reginald V. Cunningham, MEd, also joins us as a Research Assistant. Reggie received his Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Coppin State University in 2004 and completed a Post-Graduate Certification in Clinical Community Counseling from The Johns Hopkins University (JHU) in 2007. Prior to coming to the MIRECC, he worked for Cornerstone, a research-based substance abuse treatment center at the JHU/Bayview campus. He also volunteers as a substance abuse consultant and lends therapeutic mentoring to adolescent males at Aunt Hattie's Place, Inc., a

therapeutic group home for boys. Reggie will be a recruiter and therapist for Dr. Bellack's dual diagnosis treatment study, and a recruiter for Dr. Tenhula's vocational intervention study.

Lan Li, MS, joined our biostatistics team after receiving her Master's Degree in statistics from the University of Maryland Baltimore County. She previously worked for the Primary Care Policy Center, Department of Health Policy and Management, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. Lan will be working on the data from various research projects with Drs. Alan S. Bellack, Melanie Bennett, and Dwight Dickinson.

We are also pleased to welcome **Sarah Hope Lincoln, BA**. Sarah Hope received her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Wellesley College in 2006, and recently completed an internship at the US Naval Academy, where she studied moral development and ethical decision making. She will be working on various projects in the data management department at the Center for the Behavioral Treatment of Schizophrenia and the MIRECC.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Family Support and Education Program

Tuesday, October 16, 2007

2:30 - 3:30 pm

Baltimore VA, 6th floor lobby

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 day 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 for further information, please contact **Amy Drapalski, PhD** by phone: (410) 605-7000 x4899; or email: amy.drapalski@va.gov.

Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar

First Thursday of every month:

November 1, 2007

December 6, 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.

15th Annual Maryland Schizophrenia Conference

Tuesday, November 13, 2007
8:00 - 4:30 pm
BWI Airport Marriott
1743 West Nursery Road
Linthicum, MD

On-line registration is available at: www.mdschizconf.org

Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program

Application Deadline: December 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, 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, 410-706-3244.

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