



# VISN 6 Mid-Atlantic MIRECC Post Deployment Mental Health

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## Updates

### A "Thanks" to our Advisory Board!

John A. Fairbank, PhD and Robin A. Hurley, MD

Thank you so much for attending our meeting on Friday December 12, 2008. Your advice, guidance, and support have been crucial to our work and to our future planning. We know that it is always a challenge to spend an entire day in one meeting. As a MIRECC, we have taken notes from your words of advice and will begin to address the issues raised.

### Briefing for Secretary Peake

Dr. James B. Peake visited our VISN on November 25. Dr. Peake serves the nation as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Secretary Peake came to the Durham VAMC to present the President's Volunteer Service Award for Excellence in Voluntary Service. This was awarded to a number of volunteers who drive DAV vans.



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### New MIRECC Researcher Hampton VAMC



My name is Sarah Ingle. Being an Air Force kid, it's a little difficult to say exactly where I'm from, but I lived in Texas for 14 years. I did my undergraduate work at Texas Tech University and earned my Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. I moved to the Hampton Roads area of Virginia in 2007 for my internship at the Hampton VAMC, loved the area, and decided to stay.

Working with veterans has been a long-held goal of mine, especially being a daughter and a niece of Vietnam veterans. I feel honored to serve the men and women that have given so much to and for this country. The Hampton VAMC has been a wonderful training site with diverse

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## In the News!



### CLINICIAN'S TRAUMA UPDATE 2(5), OCTOBER 2008

This issue featured two recent articles from our Research component!

Calhoun PS, Elter JR, Jones ER, Kudler H, Straits-Troster K. (2008) *Hazardous alcohol use and receipt of risk-reduction counseling among US veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*. Journal of Clinical Psychiatry

McDonald SD, Beckham JC, Morey RA, Calhoun PS. (2008). *The validity and diagnostic efficiency of the Davidson Trauma Scale in military veterans who have served since September 11th, 2001*. Journal of Anxiety Disorders.

## Briefing for Secretary Peake

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Secretary Peake also was interested in learning about the unique and important work that is happening here to improve the health of America's veterans. The morning briefing included a presentation by members of our MIRECC. They highlighted new findings from our research on blood and neuroimaging biomarkers for PTSD, TBI and other post-deployment mental illnesses. Drs. John Fairbank, Christine Marx and Rajendra Morey, as well as our Administrative Officer, Perry Whitted, participated in the presentation to Secretary Peake and Senior Leaders of the Durham VAMC. A lively discussion ensued on the implications of this groundbreaking basic and clinical research.

## National Service

**Dr. John Fairbank** (MIRECC Director) has accepted two additional leadership positions. He is the incoming Chairman for the Undersecretary's Special Committee on PTSD, and has recently been appointed to the Psychological Health External Advisory Subcommittee of the DoD's Defense Health Board (DHB).



## New Projects

**Dr. Ruth Yoash-Gantz** recently created a VA-wide distribution list of interested neuropsychologists to facilitate communication within VA on education, research, clinical and practice issues. This list initially began with about 20 VA neuropsychologists and trainees. Within weeks, it grew to about 110 members. Dr. Yoash-Gantz served as list manager during the initial several weeks. The email group was recently migrated to a listserv as part of AVAPL (Association of VA Psychologist Leaders). Dr. Brad Axelrod (Detroit VAMC) and Jeff Burke (the AVAPL Webmaster) helped get this done. General information about the mailing list can be found at:



[http://mail.avapl.org/mailman/listinfo/neuropsych\\_avapl.org](http://mail.avapl.org/mailman/listinfo/neuropsych_avapl.org)

## Invited Lectures

On September 15 **Dr. Christine Marx (Assistant Director, Research - Interventions)** presented "*Neurosteroids as Novel Therapeutic Agents in Schizophrenia*" at the Transcending the Boundaries Workshop: New Directions in Schizophrenia Research, Duke Institute for Brain Sciences, Durham NC. Dr. Marx presented "*Neurosteroids in Schizophrenia, Depression, and PTSD: Translating Bench to Bedside*" at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI on October 17 and as Grand Rounds for the Duke University Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Durham NC on October 30. Dr. Marx presented "*Neurosteroids as Novel Agents for Smoking Cessation*" at the 14th Annual Duke Nicotine Research Conference, Durham NC on November 13.

**Dr. Robin Hurley (Associate Director, Education)** was an invited participant at the VA Secretary's *International Round Table on Traumatic Brain Injury and Related Stress Disorders* held November 17-19 in Washington DC. Dr. Hurley also presented "*Blast-Related Brain Injuries - What We Know*" at the VISN 6 Veterans Advisory Council meeting held at the Salem VAMC December 6.

## Publications

Lieberman JA, Bymaster FP, Meltzer HY, Deutch AY, Duncan GE, Marx CE, Aprille JR, Dwyer DS, Li XM, Mahadik SP, Duman RS, Porter JH, Modica-Napolitano JS, Newton SS, Csernansky JG. Antipsychotic drugs: comparison in animal models of efficacy, neurotransmitter regulation, and neuroprotection. *Pharmacol Rev.* 2008 Sep;60(3):358-403

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## New MIRECC Researcher

### Hampton VAMC

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experiences and opportunities. Since moving here, I have enjoyed discovering all that this area has to offer and look forward to my future adventures. In my spare time, I enjoy watching college football, running, and going to the beach. I also have two dogs and a cat, and they keep me both busy and balanced.

## Presentations



### International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies Chicago, IL, November 2008

Strauss JL, Marx CE, Morey RA, Jeffreys, A, Almirall D, O'Loughlin SH, Close JE, Chaudhry N, Odone, EZ. A Novel Self-Management Intervention for PTSD Related to Military Sexual Trauma; Early RCT Findings.

Morey RA, McCarthy G, Munger H, Rimmler J, Seth S, Petty CM, Hayes JP, Dolcos F, Beckham J, Schmidt S. Serotonin Transporter Gene Modulates Neural Systems for Working Memory in PTSD.

## Outreach to Community Providers



### Traumatic Brain Injury: Invisible Wounds of War

**Dr. Robin Hurley** (Associate Director, Education) and **Dr. Katherine Taber** (Assistant Director, Education) have collaborated with the CSSP and NC-AHEC to develop a series of workshops on TBI.

Workshops were presented four times in 2008. An additional five presentations will be offered at locations across North Carolina between January and June:

### 2009

Fayetteville - May 5  
Greenville - June 3  
Wilmington - June 4  
Area LAHEC - June 10  
Raleigh - June 11

## Outreach to Clergy

### Excerpts from "Healing The Warrior" by Marleen Shepherd

#### Southern Illinoisan, November 3, 2008

....."Anybody who puts a foot in the dirt of a combat zone comes home with challenges," said **John Oliver**, chief chaplain and clinical pastoral education supervisor for the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Durham, N.C. But soldiers aren't necessarily sharing these challenges with the medical community designed to support them, ..... Where they are laying their burdens down is the church. "They come to pastors at a rate of five times more often than they go to all mental health care providers combined," Oliver said.

Oliver spoke at the Marion VA last month to a dozen regional pastors about the complexities of current conflicts, which he believes are more psychologically and spiritually challenging than past wars. One difference is that this is the longest war the United States has fought with an all-volunteer force. "We have to recognize that this generation of warrior is being asked to do things no other generation of warrior has ever been asked to do," Oliver said. "Soldiers are coming home and going back three and four times. It's such a different context. It's hard to compare it." ..... Most crippling is the guilt, and what Oliver called a confusion of core ethical beliefs as soldiers struggle with their actions and religious teachings, such as "Thou shalt not kill."....

They deal with these spiritual issues in concert with the psychological traumas of battle, which include nightmares, flashbacks and a heightened sense of alertness. A constant state of anxiousness and readiness for combat serves soldiers well on the battlefield, but it's a problem at home. Operating full-time at the top of the human stress threshold actually alters brain chemistry over time, Oliver said. It can make combat veterans rash, quick to anger and more likely to turn to compulsive behaviors for relief, such as drinking. .... With support and time, most veterans can work through the traumas they have endured.

For others, the church can be vital in identifying those at highest risk. .... One way churches can help is to form support teams that "adopt a soldier." The teams should include local agencies such as the Marion VA or others that can provide professional help when needed, Oliver said. Members of the team help soldiers and their families in small, concrete ways, such as making a repair call for a stateside spouse suddenly juggling household responsibilities alone. "Remember that the little things count," said Oliver, noting that churches are most helpful by just being there for a soldier.



**Clinical Component Update**

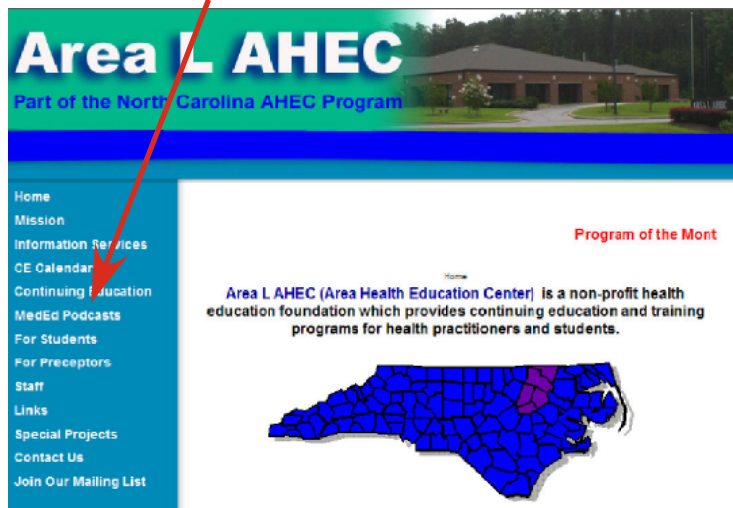
**PAINTING A MOVING TRAIN:**

**Working with Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and Their Families**

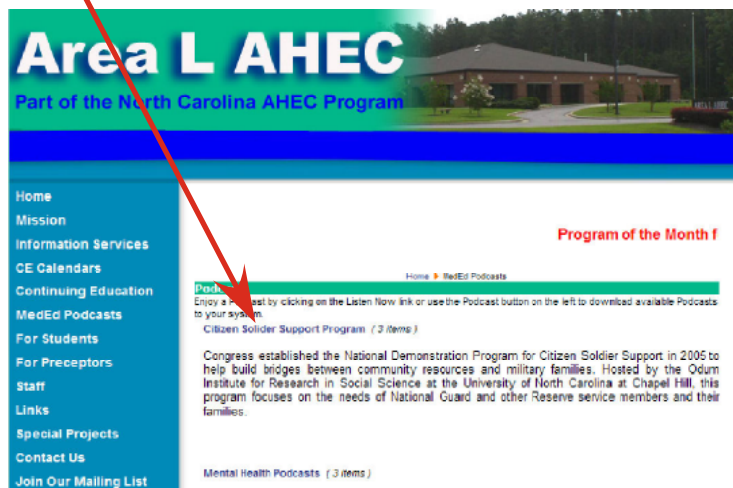
This training is now available online at the NC-AHEC website. To view the training, go to

[www.arealahec.org](http://www.arealahec.org)

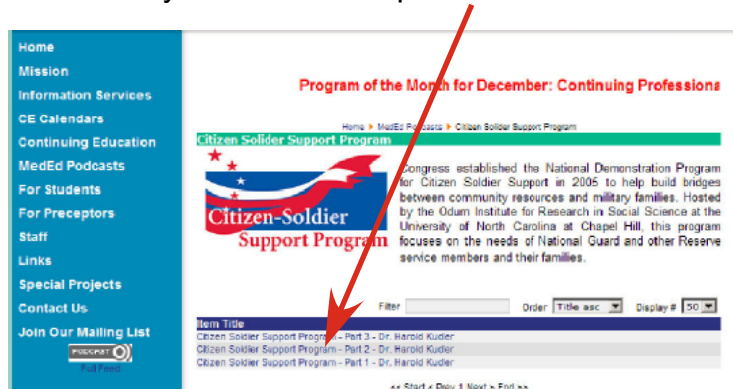
and select MedEd podcast from the listing on the left of the screen.



select Citizen Solider Support Program on the next screen



This takes you to the list of presentations.



**Publications**

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Pynoos RS, Fairbank JA, Steinberg AM, Amaya-Jackson L, Gerrity E, Mount ML, Maze J. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Collaborating to improve the standard of care. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice. Vol 39(4), Aug 2008, 389-395.

Ziedonis D, Hitsman B, Beckham JC, Zvolensky M, Adler LE, Audrain-McGovern J, Breslau N, Brown RA, George TP, Williams J, Calhoun PS, Riley WT. Tobacco use and cessation in psychiatric disorders: National Institute of Mental Health report. Nicotine Tob Res. 2008 Dec;10(12):1691-715.

**Noon V-tel Lecture Schedule:**

**January 9**

George Basher (VA Healthcare Network Upstate NY)  
*"Veteran Justice Outreach Programs"*

This series is presented by V-tel and audio conferences. We are having increasing participation from sites outside VISN 6, so our assigned numbers may change. The number that each VISN 6 site will use to dial in will be included in an email notification prior to each presentation.

If you wish to attend from a site outside of VISN 6, please contact Mary Peoples (mary.peoples1@va.gov; 704-638-9000 ext 2956) so she can make the necessary arrangements.