

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 24, 2006 Volume 7, No. 2

Editor: Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS (shannon.thomas-lohrman@med.va.gov)

NEW VISN 5 MIRECC ADMINISTRATIVE DATABASE FOR PATIENTS WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS

Submitted by Eric Slade, PhD

The Affordability of New Services for SMI Patients

Effects of specific service interventions on the total costs of patient care are increasingly being factored into decisions to offer new services to patients in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Unfounded expectations that a new service would substantially increase the health care costs of veterans with severe mental illness (SMI) could be preventing certain innovative practices from being widely offered to VA patients with SMI.

Patients with SMI already account for a disproportionately large share of VHA costs. In fiscal year (FY) 2004, the VA spent \$3.5 billion on health care services for more than 234,000 patients with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other psychotic disorders. This amounted to \$15,166 per SMI patient, nearly four times the approximately \$4,200 per patient VHA spent on health care services for all patients in FY 2004. Given the disproportionate amount of money already being spent on the care of veterans with SMI, any innovative service that carries a significant price tag could be judged unaffordable. However, certain new services, though expensive to purchase, may produce significant savings in the form of lower spending on other services. At present, little is known about the size of these cost offsets or about the affordability of new services for SMI patients. Few studies of the costs of services used by SMI patients or the cost consequences of expanded use of new or existing services have ever been completed. The MIRECC is

currently developing a capacity to carry out such studies.

Tracking Costs in the VISN

A comprehensive database is now available to MIRECC research staff for the purpose of planning or carrying out studies of health services utilization and costs for new and existing services provided to SMI patients in VISN 5. The VISN 5 MIRECC administrative database includes all VISN 5 FY 2004 patients with psychotic disorders. Information on SMI patients' treatment costs in FY 2004, their clinical diagnoses, their demographic and other background characteristics, their utilization of psychiatric and non-psychiatric services, dates of death when applicable, and other information about them kept by the VA for administrative purposes has been included in the new database.

Additional information, including results of laboratory tests and vital signs, and utilization of services provided via contracts with non-VA provider organizations, will be added over the coming months. Information on patients' Medicare-financed service use, the characteristics of VA provider organizations where care is being received, and many other topics of potential interest can be linked to the database if and when they are needed for research studies. In addition, patients' data for FY 2004 can easily be linked to administrative data from earlier years and to more recent administrative data, as they become available.

To access the MIRECC administrative database, researchers must acquire approvals of their study from the VA Maryland Health Care System Research Service and the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board. Over the next twelve months, descriptive analyses of the MIRECC's administrative database should yield much new information about

SMI patients' access to needed services, and their costs of care.

MIRECC research staff interested in accessing data from the VISN 5 MIRECC administrative database, and other persons interested in health care costs for SMI patients, should contact **Dr. Eric Slade** (Eric.Slade@va.gov) for more information.

NEW PIP UP AND RUNNING

Submitted by Mary Lambert, PhD, Cynthia Clark, RNC, and Denise Brown, RN

There is a new Points Incentive Program (PIP) program on unit 364B at the Perry Point VAMC, thanks to the hard work of Mary Lambert, PhD, Cynthia Clark, RNC, nurse manager Denise Brown, RN, and the 364B nursing staff. The PIP, a well-structured behavior management/incentive therapy program, was instituted approximately five years ago on the 364A unit, and has been operating successfully with high patient and staff satisfaction ratings. The ultimate goal of this program is to promote the learning of behaviors that will improve functioning while a veteran is on the unit, as well as when the veteran is transferred to other, less restrictive settings.

The 364B planning committee, which also includes Alicia Edwards, RN, Diane Kelly, RN, and Patricia Testerman, RN, has been meeting on a weekly basis for several months to discuss issues unique to the unit, plan educational sessions with the staff, and launch the PIP program. During the week preceding the March 20th start-up date, Denise Brown, Mary Lambert, Cynthia Clark and two consumers, who had been former patients on 364A, met with the patient group to discuss the program. Since then, the staff has worked tirelessly to get the program off to a great start, and report that it is going well. The program incorporates eleven specific target behaviors for which each patient has the opportunity to earn "points" during the course of each day. Target behaviors are selected based on their importance for community survival and their role in enhancing engagement in treatment. Most of the 364B patients are actively participating, carrying their point sheet during the day, attending groups, and meeting the behavioral expectations. For more information on the PIP program, please visit the MIRECC website at <http://www.va.gov/VISN 5mirecc/programs/pip.asp>.

EVALUATION OF THE PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAM

Submitted by Alicia Lucksted, PhD

There are many empowering programs and organizations in which people who have mental illnesses help each other create satisfying lives and address challenges. One such program is Peer-to-Peer (P2P), which is sponsored by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

In nine weekly sessions of about 2 hours each, peer mentors guide P2P participants through an interactive course covering many facets of mental health recovery. Open (without charge) to anyone with a mental illness who wants to establish / maintain wellness, the course combines lecture, interactive exercises, discussion, and structured group processes with the diverse life experiences of the participants to create lively, supportive meetings. Each course is led by a team of local, trained, peer mentors – people with mental illnesses themselves. During the nine weeks, many topics are covered, including Stigma, Discrimination, Sleep in the context of wellness, Language and Emotions as they relate to wellness, Addictions, Spirituality, Medications, etc.

The course is much in demand where it is offered, receives excellent participant evaluations, and is actively expanding. It is currently available in 21 states, and has more than 3,000 graduates. People who have completed the program speak of feeling empowered, having more tools to create and sustain their health and recovery, and feeling more able to help themselves, as well as enjoying the course.

The first formal evaluation pilot of the program is currently being carried out by MIRECC investigator **Alicia Lucksted, PhD**, in collaboration with P2P's founder Kathryn McNulty, and its program coordinator Lorener Brayboy. Data was collected from 138 participants before beginning the program and after completion, and data analysis is underway.

Locally, NAMI of Metro-Baltimore was the first pilot site for delivering P2P and so has an active program. People interested in taking the course, or those referring people to the course, should contact NAMI Metro-Baltimore at 410-435-2600 or namimetrobaltimore@yahoo.com. Additional information is also available at

UPCOMING EVENTS

Family Support and Education Program: Spirituality and Coping with Mental Illness

Thursday, April 27, 2006

4:00 – 5:30 PM

Meet at 6th Floor Lobby of Baltimore VA Medical Center

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 once per 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 x 4756, or email: aaron.murray-swank@va.gov.

NAMI Walks for the Mind of America

April 30, 2006

Check-in at 10:00 AM

Centennial Park, Ellicott City, MD

From www.nami.org: “Every journey begins with that first step. In 2006, thousands of concerned citizens in more than 60 communities across the nation will join NAMI's Campaign for the Mind of America and walk together to raise money and awareness about our country's need for a world-class treatment and recovery system for people with mental illness.”

For more information about the NAMI Maryland event, contact Dana Lefko at dmlefko@aol.com, or 410-863-0470.

Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program Application Deadline

June 1, 2005

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. The first round of applications were received September 1, 2005, and reflected a diversity of VA programs and innovative ideas.

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

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 or 410-605-7000, x 4740.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
http://www.va.gov/VISN_5mirecc