

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 18, 2001 Volume 2, No. 4

Editor: Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, M.S. (Shannon.Thomas-Lohrman@med.va.gov)

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

*Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, M.S.
Project Manager, VISN 5 MIRECC*

In most issues of the MIRECC MATTERS newsletter and on our website, we hint at the fact that VISN 5 MIRECC investigators are among the international leaders in their respective fields of study. Whether they are conducting painstaking research or cutting-edge clinical interventions, they are wholly dedicated to improving the care of seriously mentally ill veterans. In addition, they are impacting their fields beyond the VA by publishing research findings and sharing their expertise with other professionals around the world, who can in turn improve the quality of life for their patients. In this issue, we're going to start to give you an idea of their far-reaching accomplishments and the impact they are having. Look for updates in future issues.

In just the past year, VISN 5 MIRECC investigators were invited to give 41 lectures or grand rounds presentations in various locations in the United States, Canada, Italy and Switzerland. They collectively authored 10 book chapters and published 85 articles in such prestigious journals as the American Journal of Psychiatry (**Robert Buchanan, MD, Gunvant Thaker, MD**), British Journal of Psychiatry (**Alan S. Bellack, PhD**), Archives of General Psychiatry (**William Carpenter, Jr., MD**), and the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology (**Alan S. Bellack, PhD**). Finally, marks of distinction were presented to **William Carpenter, Jr., MD** as he received both the University System of Maryland Board of Regents' Faculty Award for Excellence in Research/Scholarship/Creative Activity (the highest honor bestowed by the Board of Regents) and the Lieber Prize for Outstanding Research in Schizophrenia from the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Affective Disorders (NARSAD), **Stephen Deutsch, MD, PhD** as the recipient of the 2000 NARSAD Distinguished Investigator Award, and **Julie Kreyenbuhl, PhD** as she received the National Institute of Mental Health New Clinical Drug Evaluation Unit (NCDEU) New Investigator Award.

Too many to print here, the wide range of topics and journals in which the publications appear can be found in more detail on our website at www.va.gov/visn5mirecc.

VISN 5 MIRECC PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS UPDATE

- **The Family Needs Assessment Project**

Relatives and other caregivers play an important role in the lives and services of veterans with serious mental illnesses. They provide ongoing emotional support, financial assistance, and even housing and advocacy. They often help with activities of daily living such as cooking, budgeting, and cleaning. They may also help their ill relative obtain and access mental health services through transportation to appointments, assistance with medication compliance, and service coordination. These roles create a need for information and support. To address such needs within the VA health care system, they must first be identified.

The MIRECC Family Needs Assessment is learning from VA staff, veterans receiving mental health services, and their family members about family-member needs and preferences within the VA mental health programs. For this project, "family" is defined as someone other than a paid care provider who is close to or considered to be "like family" by the veteran. The family needs assessment team is comprised of **Lisa Dixon, MD, MPH** (Principal Investigator), **Alicia Lucksted, PhD**, **Bette Stewart, Family Outreach Coordinator**, **Diana Seybolt, PhD**, and **Mary Lambert, MA**. The team is working with inpatient, outpatient, and dual diagnosis program staff throughout the VISN to understand the current resources offered to caregivers and the problems, issues, and successes they see as most important in this area.

To accomplish this, the team is working on a multi-phase assessment that involves collecting information from family members, program staff, and consumers. As time and resources allow, care providers, such as residential home operators, will also be offered the opportunity to share their views on these issues. The methodology used spans a process of informal conversations and relationship-building with staff, focus groups with all three groups, and then a survey. The details of these procedures will be driven by the program, staff's, consumers', and family members' priorities so that the resulting information is truly useful to them.

To date, five staff focus groups and four family focus groups have been conducted. Additional family focus groups are scheduled to take place in the next few weeks. Family members have expressed great interest in participating and are pleased that their opinions are being sought about these important issues. Although each group has differed somewhat in the issues identified, a common theme included a need for both staff and family members to be better informed about the numerous resources available within the VA. Both family members who participate and VA program staff receive a summary of the issues raised in these groups.

Although this project is specifically aimed at identifying family members' needs within VISN 5, it is anticipated that this needs assessment will be useful to VA mental health programs outside the VISN as well.

CONFERENCE UPDATES

WE'RE OFF TO A GREAT START!

Our **first VISN 5 MIRECC conference** entitled "The Assessment and Management of Psychosis and Agitation in Dementia" was met with overwhelming success. The conference, took place on April 2nd at the beautiful U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center located in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Comments from participants about our excellent speakers were extremely positive. The panel of speakers included Dr. Peter Rabins, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Dr. David Loreck, Baltimore VA, Dr. Pierre N. Tariot, University of Rochester Medical Center, and Cynthia Steele R.N., Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The conference room was filled to capacity with 252 participants, including 186 VA employees and 66 non-VA attendees.

NAVAPAL

The VISN 5 MIRECC was well represented among the speakers and participants at the recent National Association of VA Psychiatrists in Administration and Leadership (NAVAPAL) Conference entitled **Schizophrenia: Scientific, Clinical, and Economic Challenges to the VA**. The conference, open to VA and non-VA mental health professionals as well as consumer advocates, was held in Ellicott City, Maryland from March 27th to 29th.

After welcoming remarks by **James Nocks, MD**, Director of the VA Capitol Health Care Network, and opening comments by **Laurent Lehmann, MD**, Chief Consultant for Mental Health, **William Carpenter, Jr., MD**, Director of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center (MPRC), gave a highly informative and provocative Keynote Address on the deficit syndrome in schizophrenia. Later in the program, **Carol Tamminga, MD**, Deputy Director of MPRC, and **Stephen Deutsch, MD, PhD**, Director, VISN 5 Mental Health Service Line, were featured speakers in the Neuroscience Symposium. During the second session, **Anthony Lehman, MD**, Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at University of Maryland Baltimore, spoke about the economic impact of schizophrenia. During the Clinical Symposium, **Alan S. Bellack, PhD**, gave a compelling presentation about the treatment of people with schizophrenia who are dually diagnosed with substance use disorders, and **Lisa Dixon, MD** addressed the issues surrounding families with a seriously mentally ill member. Finally, breakout sessions were conducted by **Paul Ruskin, MD**, and **Robert Kane, PhD**.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 29 - May 2, 2001

The International Congress on Schizophrenia Research

Presented by the William K. Warren Foundation, Maryland Psychiatric Research Center and National Institute of Mental Health

Location: Whistler Resort, British Columbia

For more information:

Phone: (410) 402-6804

Fax: (410) 402-6077

<http://www.schizophreniacongress.org>

September 17, 2001

8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Speaking the Unspoken: Racial Disparities in Mental Health Services for African Americans with Schizophrenia

Presented by the VA Capitol Health Care Network VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC), the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Chesapeake Health Education Program, Inc. (CHEP)

Location: The Maritime Institute of Technology
Linthicum, Maryland (near the BWI Airport; off Route 295)

This conference will focus on the diverse aspects of racial disparities in mental health care for African Americans with schizophrenia. There will be nationally known speakers, workshop sessions, and a research poster display.

Contact Gwen Kergides at 800-949-1003 x 5472 or gwen.kergides@lrn.va.gov for more information

October 2, 2001

Mental Illness: A Family Dilemma

Presented by the VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC), and the Mental Health Clinic/Mental Health Intensive Case Management Team, Baltimore VA

Location: Baltimore VA Medical Center

A half-day seminar to provide education and support to family members of veterans with mental illness (Lunch will be provided)

This event will include an educational program about mental illness and treatment of mental illness, an overview of community and VA resources for families, and information about what we have learned from the VA family needs assessment

For more information, contact Fikre Workneh at 410-605-7257

November 13, 2001

1:00pm-5:00pm

9th Annual Maryland Schizophrenia Conference

Presented by The Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, NAMI Maryland, Maryland Council of Community Mental Health Programs, VA Capitol Health Care Network VISN 5 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC), the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Chesapeake Health Education Program, Inc. (CHEP)

Location: Martin's West

CME credits available for: Physicians, Psychologists, Nurses, Social Workers, Therapists/counselors

For more information:

Contact Toni Tinnirella at 410-402-6051 or ttinnire@mprc.umaryland.edu

Or visit www.mdschizconf.org

VISIT OUR WEBSITE at www.va.gov/visn5mirecc

REMINDER: The deadline for submission of items to the June *MIRECC MATTERS* is May 28, 2001. Please email items to Shannon.Thomas-Lohrman@med.va.gov, or call Ms. Thomas- Lohrman at 410-605-7000, x 4733.