

THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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CONFERENCE UPDATES

MENTAL ILLNESS: ISSUES FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Submitted by: Cindy Clark, RNC, CD

On Saturday, April 6th 2002, the VISN 5 MIRECC and the Partial Hospitalization Program of the VA Maryland Health Care System, Baltimore Division, welcomed veterans with mental illness and their families to a second successful conference. Speakers included Dr. David Arnold, Lead Psychiatrist for the VAMHCS, who discussed services available for veterans and families. Dr. Robert Conley, Director of Treatment and Research for the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, presented current medications and compliance, and exciting new information on anti-psychotic medications and the possible benefits for patients and their families in the future. In addition, Bette Stewart, the NAMI Maryland State Director for the Family to Family Education Program and Family Outreach Coordinator for Community Psychiatry at the University of Maryland Medical System and MIRECC staff member, led a consumer panel which discussed ongoing issues for patients with mental illness and their families.

The written evaluations and verbal comments of the sixty attendees were very positive in reaction to the conference. Families expressed interest in learning more about crisis intervention, dual diagnosis, and supportive strategies. We hope to hold more family conferences at the VAMHCS, Baltimore and Perry Point Divisions, Martinsburg, and Washington to continue education and discussion on this important topic. If you were unable to make it this time, look for upcoming information on dates and times. We hope you can make it!

WOMEN AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

Submitted by: Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS

We are pleased to announce that the first Women and Schizophrenia conference, held at Turf Valley Conference Center in Ellicott City on April 15, 2002, was a big success! Over 300 attendees listened to internationally known speakers including Dr. Mary Seeman, from the University of Toronto, who spoke about pregnancy and breastfeeding for women on antipsychotic medication, and Dr. Anne Bassett, also from the University of Toronto, who spoke about genetic counseling. Dr. Carol Tamminga from the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center talked about gender effects on drug action in schizophrenia, and Dr. Jean Gearon, the Assistant Director of Research for our own MIRECC, gave a talk on sexual and physical abuse in women with schizophrenia. In addition, Laura Van Tosh, an independent consultant, spoke about her personal experience with a serious mental illness and her current "journey to joy". The informative day was concluded with a panel discussion with all the invited speakers.

Planning will soon be underway for our second Women and Severe Mental Illness Conference, to be held in the Spring of 2003 in the Baltimore/Washington DC area. We look forward to seeing everyone who attended on April 15 again next year. If you were unable to join us, you won't want to miss the next one - mark your calendar now!

PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS UPDATE

MIRECC HELPS IMPLEMENT EMPIRICALLY BASED THERAPIES IN VISN 5 ADDICTION TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Submitted by Joseph Liberto, MD

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI)/Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) have proven to be effective in the treatment of substance use disorders. In fact, as a matter of good clinical practice, the VA/Department of Defense Clinical Practice Guideline for Management of Substance Use Disorders (introduced in August of 2001) identifies the need for treatment programs to provide empirically based, addiction focused psychosocial interventions such as CBT and MI/MET.

In coordination with the Mental Health Service Line, the MIRECC is implementing CBT and MI/MET throughout the VISN 5 addiction treatment programming using a two-phased approach of education and clinical facilitation techniques. The first phase will be completed by May 2002, when all clinical staff in specialty addiction treatment services have attended seminars on the basic concepts of CBT and MI/MET. In the second phase, selected addiction treatment staff at the VAMHCS, Martinsburg, and Washington VAMCs will receive additional in-depth training, including hands-on case supervision through the MIRECC. We believe that this initiative will better ensure that quality CBT and MI/MET addiction treatment is being provided in VISN 5.

CBT emphasizes the role maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in substance use. The therapy focuses on learning alternative responses using such techniques as role play and rehearsal of life situations. The emphasis in CBT is on overcoming skill deficits and on coping more effectively with situations that commonly cause relapse. MI/MET focuses on helping patients build their commitment and produce internally motivated change. Instead of clinicians guiding a patient step-by-step through recovery, MI/MET utilizes motivational strategies aimed at mobilizing the patient's own resources. The availability of training in CBT and MI/MET for addiction treatment staff will enhance the quality of addiction treatment available to veterans in VISN 5.

ADVANCING EVIDENCE-BASED PRESCRIPTION OF ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATIONS IN THE VA

Submitted by Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD, Carolyn Heimberg, MD, Matt Nelson, PharmD, David Arnold, MD

There is widespread agreement that the pharmacotherapy of schizophrenia and related psychotic disorders should be evidence-based. This is supported by the recent development and distribution of treatment recommendations/guidelines by several groups, including the VA Mental Health Strategic Health Care Group and Psychosis Working Group, the Schizophrenia Patient Outcomes Research Team, the American Psychiatric Association, and the Texas Medication Algorithm Project.

The past decade has seen the introduction of clozapine (Clozaril®), followed by the introduction of four "new-generation" antipsychotic agents, including risperidone (Risperdal®), olanzapine (Zyprexa®), quetiapine (Seroquel®), and ziprasidone (Geodon®). One clear advantage of the new-generation antipsychotic medications is improved tolerance by patients, in terms of extra-pyramidal side effects and tardive dyskinesia. As such, the new-generation antipsychotic agents are generally recommended as first-line therapies for psychotic disorders.

In an effort to provide guidance in the prescription of the new-generation antipsychotic agents, clinicians and researchers from the VISN 5 MHSL Psychiatry Practice Council, the MIRECC, and the Maryland

Psychiatric Research Center have collaborated to design an educational tool for VAMHCS clinicians. This group includes **Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD, Carolyn Heimberg, MD, Matt Nelson, PharmD, David Arnold, MD, Paul Ruskin, MD, and Joseph Liberto, MD**. The tool consists of several tables that provide at-a-glance comparisons of the antipsychotic agents, including dosage forms and strengths, side effects, and potential drug-drug and drug-disease interactions. This tool also includes cost data to bring the cost impact of prescription choices to the prescriber's attention.

A laminated, pocket size form of the educational tool will be distributed within the VAMHCS, followed by presentations to prescribing clinicians explaining the background and rationale for the tool. The tool will be available on the VISN 5 MIRECC website at www.va.gov/visn5mirecc/antipsy.com (not currently available). Feedback from clinicians and new research will be incorporated to update the tool every six months. We will assess changes in local prescribing patterns following introduction of the educational tool. In conjunction with the VAMHCS Pharmacy Service, antipsychotic prescribing patterns will also be analyzed and feedback will be provided to clinicians on a monthly basis.

It is anticipated that distribution of the antipsychotic prescribing tool will extend beyond the VAMHCS to other VISN 5 sites in the near future. In addition, we hope to expand the tool by adding further details on how best to monitor for the adverse effects of antipsychotic medications, such as weight gain, hyperglycemia, and hyperlipidemia. We also plan to collect information on selected patient outcomes (e.g., hospitalization rates, adverse effects, symptom measures, use of concomitant medications) to determine if outcomes are improving as a result of changes in antipsychotic prescribing practices. It is our hope that the development of this prescribing tool will provide clinicians with valuable information and result in overall enhancements in pharmacotherapy for veterans with serious mental illnesses.

NATIONAL VA TELEVISION EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Employee Education System, in cooperation with the Mental Health Strategic Healthcare Group, is producing a satellite broadcast titled "The Road to Recovery for Veterans with Serious Mental Illness." This program is designed to provide in-depth exposure to the essential elements of a recovery-oriented mental health system. It is scheduled for May 14, 2002 from 1:00pm to 2:30pm Eastern Time on the VA Knowledge Network, Channel 1. We encourage everyone to attend this informative program and you are encouraged to come with questions, as there will be a Q & A session as a part of the live satellite broadcast. Look out for an email with further details on this program, including locations and rooms. Hope you can make it!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Schizophrenia Seminar Series 2002 Continues

The seminars are being video-conferenced and will be held on Fridays from 12:00pm to 1:00pm. The Vtel conference room locations are:

Baltimore - 6A-168 (MIRECC)

Perry Point - Building 364 conference room

Washington - Room 3A-145

Martinsburg - Room 6B-122

Date	Topic	Presenter
April 26, 2002	Psychopharmacology	Robert Conley, MD
May 3, 2002	Movement Disorders	Matthew Nelson, PharmD
May 10, 2002	Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Schizophrenia and Other Serious Mental Illnesses	Richard Goldberg, PhD
May 17, 2002	Smoking & Schizophrenia	Melanie Bennett, PhD
May 31, 2002	Substance Abuse & Schizophrenia	Joseph Liberto, MD

September 23, 2002

Double Trouble: Substance Abuse and Mental Illness

Location: US Fish and Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center, Shepherdstown, WV
(located 8 miles from the Martinsburg VAMC)

This one-day conference will cover issues related to the assessment and treatment of veterans with both substance abuse and severe mental illness. Topics will include: psychopharmacological management, non-pharmacological treatment, integrated services, and psychopathology.

To register or for more information, contact Gwen Kergides 1-800-949-1003, ext. 1857 or Gwen.Kergides@lrn.va.gov

December 2 & 3, 2002

Schizophrenia and the Criminal Justice System

Location: Sheraton Baltimore North Hotel, Towson, MD

This two-day conference will cover issues related to the interface between the criminal justice system and the mental health treatment needs of patients with schizophrenia. Topics will include: treatment of inmates with schizophrenia, prison diversion programs, the reduction of recidivism, and innovative programs for community re-entry.

To register or for more information, contact Erica Chestnut 1-800-949-1003, ext. 1857 or Erica.Chestnut@lrn.va.gov

Spring 2003

Women and Severe Mental Illness

Location and topics to be announced.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE at www.va.gov/visn5mirecc