

An Electronic Publication of the VA Capitol Health Care Network  
(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center

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## **THE FAMILY INTERVENTION TEAM (FIT)**

*Submitted by Melissa Wuechner, LCSW-C &  
Amy Drapalski, PhD*

Family services for veterans with serious mental illness have been shown to reduce relapse rates and hospitalizations, reduce the level of stress for the veteran and family, and encourage the recovery process by helping to decrease symptoms of mental illness. In an effort to deliver these positive outcomes, the Family Intervention Team (FIT) was created to provide family services to VAMHCS veterans with serious mental illness and their families.

Developed by Dr. Lisa Dixon, Associate Director of Research for the MIRECC and Director of the Family Intervention Team, in collaboration with Mental Health Service Line staff, the FIT is a multidisciplinary team that includes a social worker, nurse, and psychology technician who are available to provide individual and group family psychoeducation services at the Baltimore and Perry Point VAMCs. The team acts as an addition to the veteran's treatment team and works in conjunction with the veteran's current providers.

The FIT team offers the following services:

**Family Support and Education Groups:** are for veterans with mental illness and their families. Groups are designed to support the needs of the veteran and families and can be provided in inpatient and outpatient settings.

**Brief Family Consultation:** helps families and veterans address a focused problem in 1-3 private sessions.

**Family Education Conference:** is an annual half-day seminar for veterans receiving mental health services and their families. Expert speakers disseminate information about mental health recovery, tools for recovery, family/caregiver involvement in their relative's clinical care, and VA and community support services. This year's conference, "Living Healthy, Living Well," will be held on Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup> from 9 AM - 12 PM (registration starting at 8:30) in the second floor auditorium at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. The focus will be on issues related to co-occurring mental and medical illnesses, as well as strategies for promoting health and wellness. Lunch will be provided and parking is available in the VA garage. See Upcoming Events for more details.

**Family Psychoeducation Program:** is an intensive service in which individual families and veterans meet with a clinician for approximately 20 sessions over nine months to receive support, education, and skills training on mental illness and its treatment.

For questions or referrals, please contact Melissa Wuechner, LCSW-C, Associate Director, Family Intervention Team, at 410-605-7000, ext 4565 or pager 410-447-4311.

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## USPRA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

*Submitted by Richard Goldberg, PhD*

Richard Goldberg, PhD, Associate Director of the MIRECC Clinical Core and Hubsite Director for the VA Interprofessional Fellowship Program in Psychosocial Rehabilitation, is actively involved in the upcoming US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (USPRA) annual conference. The theme of the 2008 conference, to be held in Chicago from June 16-19, is "There's a New Wind Blowing: Innovations in Psychiatric Rehabilitation". Dr. Goldberg will be a presenter in a seminar focusing on health promotion intervention research and curriculum development. He will talk about his research on a weight management and physical activity intervention, as well as his work on the development and evaluation of a chronic illness self-management curriculum, both for seriously mentally ill adults. He is also organizing a new conference feature to showcase innovations in psychiatric rehabilitation and related programming within the VA system. The Department of Veterans Affairs Innovation Fair will feature exciting VA-based rehabilitation programming. For more information about this program, please contact Dr. Goldberg via email (rgoldber@psych.umaryland.edu or

Richard.Goldberg@va.gov). For more information about the USPRA Conference, visit [www.uspra.org](http://www.uspra.org).

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## CONGRATS ARE IN ORDER!

Dwight Dickinson, PhD, Assistant Director of the MIRECC Research Core, has been promoted to Associate Professor at the UMB School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry. Congratulations Dwight!

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## RECENT MIRECC PUBLICATIONS

Morris, S.E., Heerey, E.A., Gold, J.M., & Holroyd, C.B. (2008). Learning-related changes in brain activity following errors and performance feedback in schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Research*, 99, 274-285.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar

First Thursday of every month:

May 1, 2008

June 5, 2008

1:00 - 2:00 PM

MIRECC conference room, BVA (6A-168)

or PPVA VTel conference room, Bldg 364 (C-110)

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.

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### **NAMI Walks for the Mind of America**

Saturday, May 3, 2008  
Check-in: 10:00 AM  
Centennial Park  
Ellicott City, MD  
Distance: 2.4 MI

Join the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) for their annual fund and awareness raising walk. For more information, visit [www.md.nami.org](http://www.md.nami.org).

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### **Living Healthy, Living Well Family Conference**

Saturday, May 10, 2008  
8:30 AM - 12:00 PM  
BVAMC Auditorium

Veterans with mental illness, their families, and mental health staff are invited to join us for this informative ½-day VISN 5 MIRECC conference. The focus will be on issues related to co-occurring mental and medical illnesses, as well as strategies for promoting health and wellness. Scheduled speakers include: Lisa Dixon, MD, MPH, who will discuss co-occurring illnesses and health related problems; Richard Goldberg PhD, who will present strategies to promote health and wellness; and Donald Thomas RNC, M Ac., who will discuss relaxation techniques and lead a breathing and stretching activity for all participants.

Following the presentations in the auditorium, there will be lunch and resource tables available in the cafeteria. For more information, please contact Cindy Clark, RN, at 410-605-7298, or [Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov](mailto:Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov)

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### **Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program**

**Application Deadline:** June 1, 2008

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](mailto:Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov), 410-706-3244.

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## **Continuing the Transformation of VHA Mental Health Care Conference**

July 22- 24, 2008

Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Washington DC

Join us at this year's national VA Mental Health conference. Mental health professionals, Vet Center counselors, mental health administrators, and readjustment counseling program officials can share information on the current state of implementation of the Mental Health Strategic Plan, the utilization of enhancement funding, and research-informed practices, as well as best practices identified by clinicians in the field. Links to conference registration information will be posted on the MIRECC Centers Educational Activities page ([www.mirecc.va.gov/national-mirecc-ed-activities.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/national-mirecc-ed-activities.asp)) when available.

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<http://www.va.gov/VISN5mirecc>