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Small Grants Program Sends Vets To Fatherhood Conference

Submitted by Mark Arenas, PhD

From June 11-13, 2008, veterans Howard Anthony Cox and Jarma Henson attended the 10th Annual International Fatherhood Conference, "Reconnecting Fathers to Families: At Home and Abroad" at the Gallaudet University Kellogg Conference Hotel in Washington, D.C. With funding from the VISN-5 MIRECC Small Grant Program, the men participated in workshops and seminars as representatives of the VA Maryland Health Care System. They networked with other attendees and shared their experiences in combining fatherhood issues with the substance abuse recovery process. They returned with ideas, materials, and renewed energy to help other vets become better fathers. During an evening reception at the conclusion of the first day, Mr. Cox was presented with a "Favorite Father Award", recognizing him for exhibiting the qualities of responsible fatherhood.

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Patient-Centered Approach To Improve Screening For Metabolic Side Effects

Submitted by Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD

Individuals with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses (SMI) have a mortality rate at least two times higher than persons without SMI, with the excess mortality largely attributed to higher rates of cardiovascular disease. Second-generation antipsychotic (SGA) medications, which include aripiprazole, clozapine, olanzapine, quetiapine, risperidone, and ziprasidone, are widely used to treat schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. Although these medications are beneficial in treating symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions, several have been shown to induce

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*A number of studies
have shown that patient-
centered care improves
health outcomes and
satisfaction*

National Mental Health Conference 2008

Submitted by Christine Calmes, PhD, Jason Peer, PhD, and Melissa Nidecker, PhD

The "Continuing the Transformation of VA Mental Health Services: Bridging the Gaps" conference was held from July 21 to July 24, 2008, in Arlington, VA. This conference enabled key leaders, providers, researchers and educators to address implementation and evaluation aspects of the Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics. This national conference also afforded VHA researchers and clinicians the opportunity to identify strategies to improve the implementation and monitoring of innovative care across the continuum of VHA Mental Health Services.

The conference focused on increasing recovery oriented services, integrating care, promoting a national model for suicide risk identification and prevention, addressing the needs of returning soldiers and their families, preventing homelessness among veterans, increasing safety and access to care, and implementing evidence based treatments. It included several key note speakers, including Ira Katz, MD, Deputy Chief, Patient Care Services, Office for Mental Health, who discussed the Uniform Mental Health Services package, and Colonel Charles W. Hoge, MD, who discussed mental health issues among OEF/OIF returning veterans.

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Mr. Cox co-leads a Father's Group in the intensive outpatient addictions program (the ACT Program) at the Baltimore VAMC and both he and Mr. Henson are leaders and members in the aftercare version of the Father's Group. The goals of the Father's Group include strengthening the bond between veterans and their children, breaking the cycle of non-involvement, re-establishing family connections by making amends, and developing meaningful and reliable fathering styles.

If you would like more information about the Father's Group, please contact Mark Arenas at mark.arenas@va.gov or 410-605-7406.

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metabolic side effects such as weight gain, increases in blood glucose, and increases in cholesterol. These side effects may contribute to the high rates of cardiovascular disease observed in persons with SMI.

Despite the proliferation of clinical guidelines that recommend screening for weight gain and elevations in blood glucose and cholesterol in individuals prescribed SGAs, adherence to these guidelines is inadequate, representing a serious patient safety concern. A number of studies have shown that patient-centered care, characterized by an effective partnership between clinicians and patients that promotes participation by patients in their own care, improves health outcomes and satisfaction. The development of *MyHealthVet*, an innovative, internet-based tool that enables VA patients to access their computerized medical records and to track their health outcomes, exemplifies the VA's commitment to patient-centered care.

Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD, recently received a Merit Award from the VA Health Service Research and Development Service to conduct an investigation of a computerized, patient-centered intervention aimed at increasing rates of screening for the metabolic side effects of SGAs. Half of the 240 study participants will view a brief computer program that provides personalized health information on how well their care adheres to guidelines for screening for the metabolic side effects of SGAs. The tool will be designed using principles shown to enhance understanding of internet websites by persons with cognitive impairments. The other half of participants will receive printed information on the metabolic side effects of SGAs and general recommendations for screening.

Participants will be exposed to the computerized intervention or written materials up to three times immediately prior to a visit with their prescribing clinician over the one-year study period. At the end of the study, the investigators will determine whether participants in the computer intervention have higher rates of appropriate screening compared to participants who receive written educational materials. Investigators will also study whether patterns of patient-prescriber communication around screening for metabolic side effects differs between the two groups of participants. This innovative aspect of the study will provide much needed information on the extent to which individuals with serious mental illnesses participate in their own medical care decisions.



"MyHealthVet" enables patients to access their medical records and track their health outcomes

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Additionally, the program included an address from the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, The Honorable James B. Peake, MD.

The VISN 5 MIRECC was well represented at this year's conference. Lisa Dixon, MD, MPH, and Amy Drapalski, PhD, presented results from a Critical Time Intervention investigation designed to facilitate continuity of care

between inpatient and outpatient treatment for veterans with serious mental illness, and Drs. Jason Peer and Melissa Nidecker presented posters.

Welcome to New MIRECC Staff

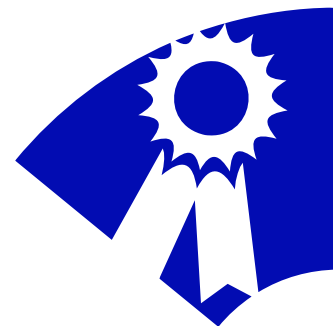
Christine Calmes, PhD, joins the MIRECC as a post-doctoral fellow following the completion of her doctorate degree in clinical psychology from the University at Buffalo: The State University of New York, and a one-year internship in clinical psychology at the VAMHS/University of Maryland School of Medicine Consortium. Dr. Calmes will be working with Drs. Alicia Lucksted, Amy Drapalski, Richard Goldberg, and Lisa Dixon on research related to the development of an intervention for people with serious mental illness, designed to reduce internalized stigma, encourage health behaviors, and examine the role of families in recovery from serious mental illness.

Lynnae Hamilton, PhD, joins us following the completion of her doctorate in clinical psychology from Fielding Graduate University. Her previous research included an exploration of African-American community attitudes and

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Congrats Are In Order!

We are pleased to announce that **Wendy Tenhula, PhD** has agreed to assume the position of Associate Director of the MIRECC Fellowship, with primary responsibility for Psychology Fellows. Dr. Tenhula has been actively involved in both Pre-doctoral Internship training and in the Fellowship program for several years and will succeed Dr. Sarah Morris in this position.



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perceptions related to schizophrenia and participation in research, and her interests include developing culturally-sensitive psychosocial treatments for schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses. Dr. Hamilton will be coordinating tasks related to the MIRECC studies being conducted at the Washington DC VAMC.

Joseph Hassell, MA, joined the MIRECC in July 2008 following the completion of his pre-doctoral internship at the VAMHCS/UMB Psychology Internship Consortium. He received his Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Pepperdine University and is currently a Clinical Psychology PhD student at Alliant International University-Los Angeles Campus. During his graduate studies, Joe worked at the Greater Los Angeles VAMC for four years as a coordinator on multiple studies focused on serious mental illness. Joe will be working at the Washington DC VA Medical Center completing assessments for multiple MIRECC studies.

Good-bye and Good Luck

Research Assistant **Jessica Hartranft, MSW**, left the MIRECC in July for a position as Director of the Outreach North Program at Threshold Services in Rockville. Outreach North is a psychiatric rehabilitation program for clients with serious mental illness who live in their own homes, other people's homes, or are homeless.

Research Assistant **Vera Sturm, MS**, left the MIRECC for a position in the Division of Services Research, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry. Vera will be a Research Specialist, coordinating Dr. Lisa Dixon's Family To Family study. She will also continue to coordinate the MIRECC's PHLAG evaluation.

UPCOMING EVENTS

◆ Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar ◆

First Thursday of every month:

September 4, 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.

◆ **Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program** ◆
Application Deadline: September 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, 410-706-3244.

◆ **Living Healthy/Living Well Conference** ◆
Fall 2008

The VISN 5 MIRECC and staff at the Perry Point VA Medical Center are planning a Fall family conference for veterans with mental illness and their families/caregivers. The "Living Healthy/Living Well" conference, which has been well received at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, will be held at the Perry Point VAMC in October, 2008.

Lisa Dixon, MD, will discuss co-morbidity concerns, Richard Goldberg, PhD, will present wellness strategies, and Don Thomas, RNC, will present a stress-reducing relaxation exercise. In addition, a consumer will discuss his/her own experiences with recovery and health issues.

For more information, please contact Cynthia Clark, RNC, at 410-605-7298 or Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov.

◆ **Annual Maryland Schizophrenia Conference** ◆
Maryland Psychiatric Research Center

Thursday, November 6, 2008
BWI Airport Marriott
1743 West Nursery Road, Baltimore

For more information, go to www.mdschizconf.org

Visit our website at
<http://www.va.gov/VISN5mirecc>