

THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center
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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

*Alan S. Bellack, Ph.D., ABPP
Director, VISN 5 MIRECC*

It was long awaited but it finally happened on November 29th, 2000, when the Dedication Ceremony and ribbon cutting for the VISN 5 MIRECC was held. We were thrilled to have **U. S. Senator Barbara Mikulski** as our honored guest to provide special remarks and cut the red ribbon. Also speaking and joining in the ribbon cutting were **Larry Lehmann, M.D.**, Chief Consultant, Mental Health Strategic Health Care Group, Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Central Office, **James J. Nocks, M.D., MSHA**, Director, VA Capitol Health Care Network, **Robert M. Malone, Jr.**, Acting Director, VA Maryland Health Care System, and **Donald E. Wilson, M.D.**, Vice President for Medical Affairs and Dean, School of Medicine, University of Maryland, Baltimore. The second floor auditorium of the Baltimore VAMC was filled with guests from the offices of U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes and U.S. Representative Elijah Cummings, the Maryland Veterans Commission, the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, congressional staff representatives, state Veteran's Service Organization commanders and presidents, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, VAMHCS employees and University of Maryland associate deans and psychiatry staff.

Many people who, for the past year, committed themselves to the demanding work, perseverance and vision required to establish this outstanding MIRECC enjoyed themselves at the reception following the ribbon cutting. Special thanks to **Wendy Tenhula, Ph.D.**, **Mary Lupi**, and **Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, M.S.**, for their detailed planning and organization of the ceremony and reception. We also could not have pulled this important event off without the help of **Dave Edwards** and his **Public and Community Relations** office, **Jordan Denner** and the **Medical Media Production Service** staff, and the indefatigable help of **Environmental Management Service, Facilities and Engineering**, and the **Police and Security staff**. If you were unable to join us for the big event, you can share in the excitement of the day by [viewing photos](#).

With the dedication celebration now behind us, we eagerly look forward to the on-going achievements of the VISN 5 MIRECC during the coming year. We have many exciting research, clinical and educational projects underway and many possibilities to accomplish our goal of providing cutting edge care to seriously mentally ill veterans.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

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

Did you happen to notice the new name of this edition? Because we want to be *sure* to get your attention when this newsletter crosses your computer, we put out feelers for a snappy new title. After some brainstorming, **Ana Sobel, MA**, of the Center for the Behavioral Treatment of Schizophrenia at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, came up with "**VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS**". (Unfortunately, she didn't get a prize, but has our thanks for her creativity and perseverance!)

You may also have noticed that there's been a change at the Editor's desk. **Richard Goldberg, Ph.D.**, who brought this electronic newsletter to life by acting as the first editor, has passed the editorial keyboard on to me so that he can take on increasing responsibility as the Assistant Director of the MIRECC Education Core. Please help me fill his shoes by emailing me with any questions you may have about the VISN 5 MIRECC or ideas you have for newsletter items. If you would like further information about our research, education or clinical programs, I will forward your question to the appropriate person so that you receive a thorough answer. MIRECC investigators, please continue to send me updates on your research, new clinical programs or events so that everyone can share in your cutting-edge advancements for seriously mentally ill veterans.

NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR RESEARCH

As you may know, Dr. Anthony Lehman has accepted the position as Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, and will not continue as the MIRECC Associate Director for Research. We are pleased to announce that **Lisa Dixon, M.D.** has agreed to take the position. There are a number of vital tasks that she will tackle immediately, including: establishing a protocol submission and tracking system, establishing a support and monitoring system for IRB and Human Subjects procedures, and exploring Human Subjects issues surrounding our planned data base and data sharing programs.

Dr. Dixon is an internationally known mental health services researcher whose clinical, teaching and research activities have focused on serving persons with severe and persistent mental illness. Much of her research has focused on services to families. She has also examined the impact of co-morbid disorders on severe and persistent mental illness, including substance abuse and medical conditions such as diabetes. Her focus on vulnerable populations also includes the development of innovative treatment programs for the care of homeless persons.

WEBSITE!

We are very excited to announce the launch of the new VISN 5 MIRECC website! Look us up at www.va.gov/visn5mirecc to find details of current research projects, information about key MIRECC personnel, a calendar of events, our mission statement, newsletter issues, and links to other MIRECCs. In the near future, look for videotaped lectures, on-line education, and downloadable forms.

MANY thanks to **Paul Ruskin, M.D.**, for his vision of taking the MIRECC into cyberspace, and **David Grinnell**, who worked tirelessly on this impressive site and who will continue to update it.

VISN 5 MIRECC PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS UPDATE

The MIRECC Core Database

The MIRECC Research Core Database Committee has been meeting regularly to develop the MIRECC research database. The objectives of this database are: (1) the identification and tracking of all veterans with schizophrenia in VISN 5 who are receiving psychiatric, medical, and/or rehabilitation services in VA; (2) quantification of services and costs of these services; (3) identification and tracking of all veterans who have or are participating in MIRECC research projects, and (4) coordination of data collection efforts across MIRECC research projects.

In order to accomplish these goals, the committee has determined that the database will require aggregation of information from a variety of sources. First, in order to provide a broad-based information

system on services for veterans with schizophrenia, we will develop and maintain a composite health services research file, consisting of key service data elements from existing VA administrative data files; in particular, information on inpatient utilization from the Patient Treatment File, information on outpatient utilization from the Outpatient Clinic System, and pharmacy data. This component of the database will permit VISN-wide tracking of service patterns that can be used in health services research and performance improvement programs, as well as provide data to clinical investigators relevant to estimating subject availability and recruitment. A second major component will track all VISN 5 veterans who are currently participating in MIRECC research projects. This component will assist in coordination of efforts across projects, monitoring subject burden and efficient collection of data, eliminating redundancies when possible. Finally, the database will consist of files containing the core clinical assessments of the MIRECC. This also will help to eliminate redundancies and provide linkages across projects.

In order to realize the goals of this database, the Research Core is moving forward with a number of actions. **Julie Kreyenbuhl, Ph.D.** and **Jeanne Geiger-Brown, R.N.**, have been actively exploring the VA administrative databases to determine ease of access, content and quality. **Jack Blanchard, Ph.D.** has been working on the development of the core clinical research assessments. **Jean Gearon, Ph.D.**, **Lisa Dixon, M.D.**, and **Richard Goldberg, Ph.D.** have been exploring issues related to patient confidentiality and Institutional Review Board requirements related to the planned database.

While much work remains to realize the goal of this database, this is a high priority for the Research Core because, once developed, the database will be highly useful to many MIRECC research, clinical, and education activities.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF THE VISN5 MIRECC

Dwight Dickinson, Ph.D., J.D. recently joined the VISN 5 MIRECC after completing his clinical internship at the Baltimore Veterans Administration Hospital. Dr. Dickinson's research will involve neurocognition in schizophrenia, particularly the relationship between neuropsychological variables and everyday role functioning in inpatient and outpatient populations. His application for appointment as an Associate Investigator was recently approved by a merit review committee of the Health Services Research and Development Service of the Department of Veterans Affairs. His research and training will be supported through this appointment.

Jeanne Geiger Brown, M.S.N., R.N., C.S. joins the MIRECC while finishing her doctoral dissertation in nursing at the University of Maryland. Her background is diverse; as a nurse for 20 years she has cared for patients in critical care, emergency department, neurosurgical, spinal-cord rehabilitation, home-based terminal care, and in a variety of psychiatric settings. Her research interests derive from her recent experience in delivering psychiatric home care to chronically mentally ill patients in Philadelphia, a program that she developed and implemented. She brings with her a background in using administrative claims data for health services research, and is interested in PACT and medication adherence.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 27-29, 2001

Schizophrenia: Scientific, Clinical, and Economic Challenges to the VA

Turf Valley Resort and Conference Center, Ellicott City, Maryland
Sponsored by NAVAPAL

April 2, 2001

Assessment and Treatment of Psychosis and Behavioral Problems in Dementia

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center (NCTC)
(10 miles from the Martinsburg W. VA VAMC)

Sponsored by the VISN 5 MIRECC

April 29 - May 2, 2001

The International Congress on Schizophrenia Research

Whistler Resort, British Columbia

Sponsored by the William K. Warren Foundation, Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, Nat'l Institute of Mental Health, and Pharmaceutical Companies

For more Information:

Phone: (410) 402-6804

Fax: (410) 402-6077

<http://www.umaryland.edu/mprc>

September 17, 2001

Improving the Quality of Care for African Americans with Schizophrenia

Sponsored by the VISN 5 MIRECC

Watch for further details in upcoming issues

Reminder: The deadline for submission of items to the February *MIRECC MATTERS* is January 29, 2001. Please email items to Shannon.Thomas-Lohrman@med.va.gov, or call Ms. Thomas-Lohrman at 410-605-7000, x 4733.