

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*

Things have been relatively quiet for us since the last issue of the Newsletter compared to the Fall and early Winter. **Drs. Lisa Dixon, Wendy Tenhula, and Melanie Bennett** have all submitted applications for MERIT or NIH grants. Kathy Graf has come on board as our new secretary and has quickly proven herself to be an excellent addition to our Center. Our videoconferencing facility is under construction and should be up and running by the second week in February. The conferencing equipment for Perry Point, Washington, and Martinsburg is in the warehouse and we hope to have delivery and installation completed by the end of February. We will be delighted to give tours as soon as we learn how to operate the equipment. Our initial goal is to initiate a rapid consultation service for the STEPS program (see article below) in Building 364A, our special inpatient unit at Perry Point.

We have received positive feedback about our November, 2000 Dedication Ceremony and letters from several members of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) Maryland Board of Directors. Two of our colleagues, **Dr. Lisa Dixon** and **Bette Stewart**, are former Board members of NAMI Maryland and we look forward to developing a strong collaborative relationship with this important community organization.

VISN 5 MIRECC PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS UPDATE

Points Incentive Program (PIP) Started at Perry Point

More than two decades ago, the token economy, a breakthrough in the behavioral treatment of chronic psychotic inpatients, was introduced. The token economy is a social learning program designed to produce a motivating rehabilitation environment. Patients earn points or tokens for performing specific behaviors and then have the opportunity to exchange their points or tokens for a variety of tangible reinforcers or activities. Though highly effective on inpatient psychiatry units, the token economy has not been widely accepted into practice. For example, researchers who surveyed 152 Veterans Administration Medical Center Psychology Services in 1986 found that only 10 of them offered this form of treatment. This same study found that 90% of respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness of such programs but reported barriers to implementation.

Thanks to an innovative collaboration between MIRECC and the Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), we recently launched a token economy social learning program called the Points Incentive Program (PIP) on an inpatient unit at the Perry Point VAMC. Due to the energy and enthusiasm of the multidisciplinary PIP Committee (under the leadership of **Georgiana Donlin, Ed Suarez, Lucia Manetta, and Pat Ford**), approximately 20 patients began earning points on November 1, 2000, in the Specialized Treatment and Education Program for Schizophrenia (STEPS). High levels of administrative support, staff interest and staff participation have helped this program get off to a running start. **Ellene Hill**, a nurse at Perry Point for twenty years, said, "I am excited to work with new people with new ideas!" The program is earning very high marks from patients as well.

It is our hope that technological advances and ongoing training will allow for many shared endeavors between the MIRECC and various clinical programs within our VISN and will help reduce the barriers to successful implementation of this and other empirically supported treatments.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF THE VISN 5 MIRECC TEAM

We are delighted to welcome **Kathy Graf, B.S.**, aboard the MIRECC. Kathy recently transferred to the MIRECC from the Baltimore VAMC Substance Abuse Treatment Program (SATP). She worked with the SATP for almost ten years, initially as a program clerk and then as secretary to Dr. Joseph Liberto and others in the program. During that time, Kathy coordinated administrative duties to facilitate the smooth functioning of that sizeable program. Prior to this, she served as an office manager in the insurance industry. Located in the front of the MIRECC suite, Kathy will be the first to greet you as you enter our area. Along with general administrative functions, she will assist MIRECC investigators in the coordination of various research projects.

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 the Nat'l Assoc. of VA Psychiatrists in Administration (NAVAPAL), The Mental Health Strategic Health Care Group and CHEP, Inc.

For more information call the CHEP Office at 410-642-1857

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

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

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 and Nat'l Institute of Mental Health

For more Information:

Phone: (410) 402-6804

Fax: (410) 402-6077

<http://www.schizophreniacongress.org>

September 17, 2001

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

(Editors Note: This conference was announced in previous newsletter under a different title)

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

8:30 am - 4:30 pm

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

Sponsored by the VISN 5 MIRECC

REMINDER: The deadline for submission of items to the April *MIRECC MATTERS* is March 27, 2001. Please email items to Shannon.Thomas-Lohrman@med.va.gov, or call Ms. Thomas-Lohrman at 410-605-7000, x 4733.