

# THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center

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## JOIN US FOR THE NAMI WALK!

The third annual NAMI Walks for the Mind of America charity walk is scheduled for Sunday, May 1, 2005, at Centennial Park in Ellicott City, Maryland. The MIRECC will be sending a team of walkers and working to raise money to support The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill's many outstanding programs that serve to improve the quality of life for those living with a mental illness.

We would love to have you join the MIRECC team this year! We walk an easy 2.4 mile route, chat with colleagues and old friends, and forge new friendships with like-minded people who want to support NAMI's efforts. All in all, it's a fun morning and a great way to help patients and families dealing with mental illnesses. If you are interested in more information about NAMI, visit their website at <http://www.nami.org>. If you would like to walk with our team, or are interested in donating, please contact Shannon Thomas-Lohrman at 410-605-7000, x 4733, or [shannon.thomas-lohrman@med.va.gov](mailto:shannon.thomas-lohrman@med.va.gov).

## NEW MIRECC RECOVERY COORDINATOR

We are pleased to announce that **Alicia Lucksted, PhD**, has accepted the position of MIRECC Recovery Coordinator. In that role, she will assist the MIRECC and mental health staff across the VISN in implementing the VA

Action Agenda, which calls for the transformation of VA mental health services to a Recovery Model. The Recovery Model, which is veteran/consumer focused, serves to empower vets living with a mental illness by emphasizing their strengths and striving to include the family in the recovery process. Dr. Lucksted has extensive experience working with mental health consumer organizations and peer programs, and in fostering relationships between "consumer" and "professional" spheres.

To facilitate this transformation, Dr. Lucksted will help the VISN prepare for and meet performance measures and other mandates that will be forthcoming from the national workgroup. She will also help "cross-pollinate" existing recovery-oriented practices by ensuring that units in one part of the VISN know about successful programs at other locations, thereby lending visibility, credit, and support to the mental health staff responsible for them. She will be working to provide recovery-model resources (concepts, guides and tips) to the VISN, and developing and delivering educational programs about recovery concepts and practice to consumers, families, staff, and administrators. In addition, she will be fostering the involvement of veterans/consumers and their family members in advisory and other roles within mental health services.

Please join us in supporting Dr. Lucksted as she begins this exciting new endeavor that will benefit the veterans in our mental health system. If you would like more information, please contact her at [aluckste@psych.umaryland.edu](mailto:aluckste@psych.umaryland.edu).

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## Monthly Family Support and Education Program

Did you know that there is a great new monthly educational program for families coping with serious mental illness? **Aaron Murray-Swank, PhD**, has created a program designed for family members of veterans with serious mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression. Veterans can attend the program with their family members or other important people in their life, or the family members are welcome to attend on their own. The sessions are designed to support veterans' treatment and recovery, as well as help with caregiver burnout. The topics of the group are determined by the needs and concerns of those who attend, but are likely to include veteran benefits, VA recovery programs, medications, outpatient care, family stress, and how to cope with the impact of serious mental illness. Sessions are held one Saturday morning of the month in the Baltimore VA Medical Center. They last for 1.5 hours, parking is free in the hospital garage, and refreshments are provided. The program is flexible – veterans and families can attend just one session, or as many sessions as they would like.

For the dates of upcoming sessions, check our website at <http://www1.va.gov/visn5mirecc> (click on Family Support Workshop). Or, contact Dr. Murray-Swank at 410-605-7000, x 4756, or at [Aaron.Murray-Swank@med.va.gov](mailto:Aaron.Murray-Swank@med.va.gov).

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## WE HAVE A NEW LOOK!

The VISN 5 MIRECC website has undergone a major make-over in the last few months, and we think it looks great! Our new Webmaster, **Kim Taylor**, located at the Martinsburg, WVA VAMC, brought us into compliance with VA mandates, suggested some forward-thinking changes, and made the website easier to navigate. You will easily be able to find

information about MIRECC protocols, upcoming conferences, how to conduct mental illness research in the VAMHCS, current MIRECC clinical programs, and the Integrated Research Information System, to name but a few topics. Visit at <http://www1.va.gov/visn5mirecc> to see for yourself!

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## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF THE VISN 5 MIRECC TEAM

**Ashley Greer, MA**, recently joined the MIRECC as a Research Assistant. Ashley received his Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Loyola College in 2004, and had worked for the Kennedy Krieger Institute as a researcher and behavior therapist in the Pediatric Feeding Disorders Unit. While at Kennedy Krieger, he was responsible for conducting behavior therapy sessions with patients and educating families in basic behavioral principles and techniques. Ashley will be located at the Perry Point VAMC, working as a study therapist for the Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders in Schizophrenia and the Behavioral Treatment of Drug Abuse in SPMI Patients studies.

**Vera Sturm, MS**, has joined the MIRECC team as a Research Assistant. She graduated from Loyola College in 1998 and has extensive experience in a variety of health and mental health care settings, including work as a mental health/substance abuse therapist and a clinical manager at Johns Hopkins. Vera will serve as a study therapist for the Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders in Schizophrenia and the Behavioral Treatment of Drug Abuse in SPMI Patients studies.

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## GOOD-BYE AND THANKS

**Suzanne Greer, MSW**, was the point-person at the Perry Point VAMC for several MIRECC

studies, and acted as a study therapist for the Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders in Schizophrenia protocol, as well as an assessor for two Cognitive Remediation studies. Suzanne recently accepted a Social Work position in the MHICM program at Perry Point, and will continue to play a modified role in MIRECC studies. We want to thank her for her tireless efforts on behalf the MIRECC and wish her the greatest success in her new endeavor.

## ***UPCOMING EVENTS***

### **Understanding and Treating PTSD in Women**

May 16, 2005  
Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel, Baltimore

This one-day conference will bring together nationally known experts to discuss the latest developments in the treatment of civilian and military-related PTSD in women. The attendees will understand the concepts relevant for comorbid substance use in women with PTSD and assess common physical health issues reported by women with PTSD.

For more information, please contact Kim Gordley, Chesapeake Health Education Program (CHEP), at [kim.gordley@med.va.gov](mailto:kim.gordley@med.va.gov), or (410) 642-2411 x5403. Or, you can register on-line at <http://www.chepinc.org/conf.shtml>.

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### **National MIRECC Conference**

June 5-8, 2005  
New Orleans, Louisiana

This second national MIRECC conference is designed to:

1. Disseminate evidence-based research about suicide assessment, dual diagnosis, and treating new veterans as mandated by the New Freedom Commission;
2. Discuss relevant MIRECC research in these areas and promote collaboration among MIRECCs and co-sponsors (e.g., American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Readjustment Counseling Service, Department of Defense, MH QUERI, etc.);
3. Promote development of effective clinical techniques among providers; and
4. Provide additional training and professional development for MIRECC Fellows.

For more information, please contact Michael R. Kauth, PhD, Co-Director for Education, South Central (VISN 16) MIRECC, at [michael.kauth@med.va.gov](mailto:michael.kauth@med.va.gov).