

THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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

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PSYCHOSOCIAL REHABILITATION TRAINING PROGRAM

Submitted by Matthew Wiley, BA

The VISN 5 MIRECC is excited to announce the launch of the *VA Psychosocial Rehabilitation Training Program (VA-PRT)*. Based at the VAMHCS, the VA-PRT is a nationwide program which will provide training, technical support and consultation in evidence-based psychosocial interventions to VA practitioners and mental health program leaders working with seriously mentally ill veterans and their families. Specifically, the program will emphasize techniques of Social Skills Training (SST) based on the model developed by Drs. Alan S. Bellack and Kim T. Mueser, Susan Gingerich, MSW, and Julie Agresta, MSS, MEd. Social Skills Training is based on social learning techniques and emphasizes the role of behavioral rehearsal in skill development rather than discussion. The primary modality of training is role play of simulated conversations, typically conducted in small groups (6-8 patients), and performed twice a week in 60-minute sessions.

Over the next three years, the VA-PRT Program will train approximately 130 VA staff members per year in SST techniques. Each year approximately 70 staff will be trained in Maryland, while the remainder will be trained in California by the VISN 22 MIRECC. The inaugural workshop is slated for April 21-22, 2008, in Baltimore, Maryland. The training will include an initial two-day workshop for 30 staff members, followed by clinical consultation via

audio-conference for 24 weeks. The trained clinicians will be expected to incorporate learned treatments into their routine clinical care. In combination with existing VA evidence-based psychotherapy dissemination initiatives, this program will further help to position VA as a leader in the delivery of state-of-the-art treatments for a wide range of mental health conditions.

The VA-PRT team consists of Director Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP; Program Instructors Wendy N. Tenhula, PhD, Joanna Strong-Kinnaman, PhD, Cynthia Clark, RN, and Amy Drapalski, PhD; Consultant Jean S. Gearon, PhD; Program Manager Matthew Wiley, BA, and Program Support Assistant Fran Broomall.

An additional role of the VA-PRT is to serve as the Hub Site for the VA Interprofessional Fellowship Program in Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery. In this role, the Hub Site coordinates and monitors the seven funded VA Fellowship sites (Bedford, MA, Durham, NC, Little Rock, AR, Palo Alto, CA, San Diego, CA, Waco, TX, and West Haven, CT). The Hub Site provides technical expertise to VA staff and fellows in the Fellowship Program and serves as a liaison between the sites and VA Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The Hub Site team consists of Director Richard Goldberg, PhD, and Special Assistants Rebecca Pasillas, PhD, and Matthew Wiley, BA.

MIRECC EVALUATION A SUCCESS

The VISN 5 MIRECC participated in its first reverse site visit evaluation in October, 2007, and received an exceptional rating. The evaluation highlighted our growth in the past seven years, which we are particularly proud of. For those who do not know our background, Dr. Alan S. Bellack was recruited to the VA in 1998 with a primary responsibility of developing a MIRECC application. Notably, there was virtually no funded mental health research being conducted in the VISN at the time. The VISN 5 proposal was funded in 1999, and was essentially a promissory note to develop a world-class research program on schizophrenia and other severe mental illnesses, and to conduct cutting edge clinical demonstration and education programs. The total research portfolio of the MIRECC at that time was \$572,160, of which \$405,298 was from Dr. Bellack's grants. To create the MIRECC, Dr. Bellack hired a group of promising young scientists and enlisted the aide of leading schizophrenia researchers from the University of Maryland to build our center from the ground up. This strategy has been highly successful and our external funding for calendar year 2007 totaled \$8,098,569.

The primary mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC is to improve the care of veterans with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses within the VISN, and ultimately, within the

entire VA system and in the community at-large. This goal is achieved by generating new research data, conducting educational programs, developing new clinical programs, and evaluating the cost of new programs and systems of care. Our primary areas of emphasis include substance abuse, psychopharmacology, rehabilitation, health behaviors and medical comorbidity, recovery-oriented and family services, and health services research.

MIRECC STAFF NEWS

We are delighted that Cindy Clark, RN, C, CD will now be working full-time with the MIRECC. Cindy has been an RN in the mental health field for 23 years and was a staff nurse on the BVAMC inpatient unit for five years. She's been in the Partial Hospitalization Program as a case manager and serving in the MIRECC Education Core since 2000. As a full-time member of the MIRECC team, she will continue her work with staff education and organization of family conferences for veterans and their family members. In addition, she will be involved with several MIRECC research protocols.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Family Support and Education Program

February 19, 2008

2:30 - 4:00 pm

Baltimore VA, 6th floor lobby

The Family Support and Education Program is a monthly program for family members of veterans with serious mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression. The program is designed to help families support veterans' treatment and recovery, as well as assist family members and other caregivers as they cope with the effects of mental illness on the family. Group meetings are held one

day a month at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, and involve presentation of information and discussion, which is adapted to the needs of family members and veterans who attend.

To register for the workshop, or for further information, please contact **Amy Drapalski, PhD** by phone: (410) 605-7000 x4899; or email: amy.drapalski@va.gov.

Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar

First Thursday of every month:

March 6, 2008

April 3, 2008

1:00 - 2:00 PM

MIRECC conference room, BVA (6A-168)

or PPVA VTel conference room, Bldg 364

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: March 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, 410-605-7451 or 410-706-3244.

The Recovery Model: Meeting the CHALENG of Homelessness

Monday, March 31, 2008

8:00 AM - 3:30 PM

Maritime Institute and Conference Center, Linthicum Heights, MD

The purpose of this seminar is to provide meaningful information and training of a national VA initiative, the Recovery Model of Psychosocial Change, to VISN-wide staff as well as national and local agencies that provide services to the homeless. The ability to disseminate meaningful information across a broad spectrum of care providers on a local and national level is often a difficult task in these times of shrinking budget dollars and relevant funding streams. Now, more than ever, the idea of empowering individuals with a non-prescriptive arsenal of reintegration skills geared towards independent community reentry is essential. Meaningful dialogues addressing the fundamental issues of housing, treatment practices, legal and ethical considerations, etc., must be on the continuing forefront of discussion for all homeless providers. The education of evidence-based practices to the myriad of service providers is a vital mission if we are to be successful in our collaborative attempts to end homelessness.

To register, or for more information, visit at www.chepinc.org.

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.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
<http://www.va.gov/VISN5mirecc>