

## THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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### FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

*Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP*

We wrapped up another year by holding our second annual Advisory Committee Meeting on November 8, 2002. Committee members who attended included: **Ira Katz, MD**, Director, VISN 4, MIRECC; **Thomas Horvath, MD**, Coordinator, Science Advisor, Mental Health Strategic Health Care Group; **Thomas Kosten, MD**, Professor of Psychiatry, VA Connecticut Health Care System; **Fred Blow, PhD**, HSR&D Center of Excellence; **Susan Essock, PhD**, Director, Division of Health Science Research, Mount Sinai School of Medicine; **Joseph Friend**, VISN 5 Coordinator, NAMI Veterans Committee; **Lance Sweigart**, American Legion Service Officer. Other visitors included **Laurent Lehmann, MD**, Chief Consultant, Mental Health Strategic Health Care Group and **Jim Williams, MPA**, VA Central Office Liaison for MIRECCs. **James Nocks, MD**, Network Director, VISN 5, **Nara Simhan, MD**, Chief Medical Officer, VISN 5, and **Stephen Deutsch, MD**, Director, Mental Health Service Line, VISN 5, were on hand to provide feedback to the Committee from the perspective of the VISN, and **Dennis Smith**, Director, VA Maryland Health Care System, provided comments from the perspective of VAMHCS. I am pleased to report that the Committee members were very positive about our Center, and did not have any major concerns or suggestions for changing our direction or focus. The Committee was particularly enthusiastic about our Human Subjects Program, which was described by **Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS**, and our Data Management System, which was described by **John Junginger, PhD**. As FY 2002 moved along we generally thought that we were meeting our objectives and moving in the right direction, but it is never easy to do objective self-evaluations. Consequently, it was very gratifying to have a diverse group of renowned scientists and veterans' advocates confirm our impressions. It was also very rewarding to hear that we continue to be held in high esteem by VISN and VAMHCS leadership. As we start off a new year, I wish to thank my colleagues and MIRECC staff for their dedication and good work throughout the year.

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### OUR FIRST TWO-DAY CONFERENCE

*Submitted by Cindy Clark, RN*

We are pleased to announce the VISN 5 MIRECC presented its first two-day conference entitled "Schizophrenia and the Criminal Justice System," on December 2 and 3, 2002 at the Sheraton Baltimore North Hotel in Towson, MD. We were pleased with the turnout, of over 160 people, both from within the VA system and the community. The conference focused on research in the area of schizophrenia and the criminal justice system as well as the practical application of research in various settings.

On the first day prominent researchers in the area of criminal behavior and schizophrenia presented recent findings concerning the prevalence of Serious Mental Illness patients who are involved in the criminal justice system. For example, **John Monahan, PhD**, discussed the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study, which describes the risk factors for violent behavior among individuals with mental illness and the key issues in assessing a violence risk. **Randolph Dupont, PhD**, bridged the first and second day by presenting the Crisis Intervention Team (Memphis Model), which is a pre-booking diversion program that is being adopted by many police departments throughout the country.

The second day focused on the practical applications of research in this area. The discussions included topics on jail diversion and community re-entry. The latter part of the second day was devoted to local Maryland State and city of Baltimore perspectives on the area of mental illness and the criminal justice system.

We received many positive comments including “great place to have a conference,” appreciation for a “very valuable program,” and an “excellent conference.” We’ll continue to keep you posted on more conferences in the coming year. Stay tuned!

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## **IRIS DATABASE**

*Submitted by John Junginger, PhD*

Development continues on the MIRECC Integrated Research Information System, affectionately known as “IRIS.” IRIS is the MIRECC’s data management system. It is the resource we use to store, manipulate, and analyze data collected in MIRECC studies. Data are “read” into the IRIS database using scannable forms and arranged into tables based on factors such as date collected, name of study, etc. The data then can be re-arranged to create a variety of unique data sets to investigate various research questions. For example, a researcher might be interested in the housing resources available to veterans. By combining data across several studies that include veterans, a researcher could create a “virtual data set” consisting of demographic and other information that would characterize veteran housing.

The protocols of two on-going MIRECC studies have been entered into IRIS, with a third being prepared for entry. The scannable data forms created with Cardiff’s *TELEform* system, reduce the potential for errors by minimizing manual data entry. As more data are accumulated, there will be greater opportunities for creating “virtual data sets” of IRIS data to investigate various research questions.

We will continue to provide you with updates in the MIRECC Matters. In the meantime, be sure to review the latest additions to the Assessment Core homepage to keep up-to-date on the procedures for preparing research studies for entry into IRIS.

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## **MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE: A FAMILY PERSPECTIVE**

*Submitted by Cindy Clark, RNC*

It’s hard to believe that since October, 2001 we’ve put on three family conferences. The latest one was held on Saturday, November 9, 2002, sponsored by the VISN 5 MIRECC, for veterans with mental illness and their families. The schedule included an introduction by **John Butchart, MD**, Medical Director, Baltimore VA Partial Hospitalization Program, who discussed treatment options available in both the mental health and substance abuse areas. **Fred Osher, MD**, Director, Center for Behavioral Health, Justice, and Public Policy, Department of Psychiatry, University of Maryland, presented information about the treatment issues for the patients dealing with both a mental illness and substance abuse.

Role-plays, depicting the daily struggles of families and patients dealing with mental illness and substance abuse, were presented by The Mental Health Players (The Mental Health Association of Maryland, Inc.). The audience’s interactive response to The Mental Health Players was overwhelmingly positive.

**Bette Stewart** who is a consultant and trainer for the Family Psycho-education program at the University of Maryland, School of Medicine, presented information about community resources and NAMI Family-to-Family Education Programs. The VISN 5 Coordinator for NAMI, **Joe Friend**, also discussed the importance of family support and the Family-to-Family Education Program.

Very positive responses were expressed by the 60 attendees, which included veterans, families, and care providers. Another family conference is being planned for April, 2003 at Martinsburg VAMC.

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## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

*Submitted by Cindy Clark, RNC*

**Bette Stewart** (Consultant and Trainer for the Family Psychoeducation Program) from University of Maryland School of Medicine and **Cynthia Clark, RNC** (VISN 5 MIRECC) were invited to speak at the recent "Community Connections" conference held during the week of September 23-27, 2002, presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care to Homeless Veterans and Social Work Services. The conference focused on homeless veterans and social work issues for the VA. **Ms. Stewart** and **Ms. Clark** spoke about the on-going series of family conferences, which have been presented at the Baltimore VA Medical Center (refer to previous article above). They explained the step-by-step process that they have used, including the difficult task of locating families and encouraging attendance. Information about the fellowship that is being forged between NAMI Family-to-Family Education project and the VA was also addressed.

Because there was great interest on the part of the clinicians who attended the conference, **Ms. Stewart** and **Ms. Clark** are planning to write an article detailing the process. Keep a lookout for progress updates in the future.

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## CONGRATS ARE IN ORDER!

We would like to congratulate MIRECC post-doctoral fellow, **Sarah Morris, PhD**, who was recently awarded a VA Associate Investigator Grant from the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service. This 3-year award will provide funding for her to continue pursuing her research interests in the development and implementation of psychosocial interventions for individuals with schizophrenia under the supervision of **Alan S. Bellack, PhD**, and **Lisa Dixon, MD**.

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We are also pleased to announce that **Mark Arenas, PhD**, is the recipient of 2002's VISN 5 MIRECC Small Education Grant. **Dr. Arenas'** project, entitled "Integrating CBT and ME with Addictions Treatment," plans to familiarize clinicians with essential principles of Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT) and Motivational Enhancement (ME) as they apply to VA patients and their addiction, as well as, establish a core group of clinicians who will integrate the CBT and ME material into existing programming and create new interventions using the techniques and methodologies of CBT and ME. Congratulations **Dr. Arenas!**

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## Upcoming Events!

**The International Congress on Schizophrenia Research**

Date: March 29 – April 2, 2003

Location: The Broadmoor Hotel, Colorado Springs, Colorado

*This biennial meeting allows scientists representing the broad range of disciplines involved with discovery in schizophrenia to gather to exchange data, techniques and ideas.*

The deadline for regular registration is February 11, 2003. For more information and to register visit [www.schizophreniacongress.org](http://www.schizophreniacongress.org)

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### **Bringing Evidence-Based Mental Health Treatment to Veterans in the Community**

Date: May 4-6, 2003

Location: Marriott Portland, Portland, Oregon

*This three-day conference will include presentations and workshops covering issues pertaining to the enhancement of mental health treatment of veterans, their families and the community. Topics will include: family and caregiver support, clinical competency and models of care, and telemedicine and technology.*

For more information contact Ruth Ann Tsukuda, MPH at [RuthAnn.Tsukuda@med.va.gov](mailto:RuthAnn.Tsukuda@med.va.gov)

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### **Women and Affective Disorders 2003**

Date: June 9, 2003

Location: Sheraton Inner Harbor, Baltimore, MD

This one-day conference will discuss issues related to women with affective disorders. Topics will include affective disorders during pregnancy and post-partum, bipolar disorder across a woman's life span, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, the hormonal basis of mood disorders in women, and legal issues confronting women with serious mental illness.

For more information, contact Erica Chestnut 1-800-949-1003, ext. 1857 or [Erica.Chestnut@lrn.va.gov](mailto:Erica.Chestnut@lrn.va.gov)

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### **Schizophrenia and Medical Comorbidity**

Date: Fall 2003

***Topics and location to be announced***