

THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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WOMEN AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS: CO-MORBIDITIES AND TREATMENT CONFERENCE 2004

Submitted by Wendy Tenhula, PhD

The 3rd Annual VISN 5 MIRECC Women's Conference was held on May 17, 2004 at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel. This year's topic was Women and Substance Use Disorders, with a particular focus on co-morbidities and treatment issues. **Cora Lee Wetherington, PhD**, of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) started the day with an overview of gender differences in substance use behaviors, highlighting the implications of these differences for research and treatment strategies. This set the stage perfectly for several of the speakers who presented information on innovative programs aimed at addressing various aspects of substance use in women. For example, **Michele Levine, PhD**, reviewed current research on smoking cessation and weight gain and described an ongoing treatment and research program focused on the concerns women have about weight gain when they make efforts to quit smoking. **Dace Svikis, PhD**, spoke about substance use and its treatment during pregnancy and **George Davis, PhD**, provided information on applying the principles of dialectical behavior therapy to the treatment of women who abuse drugs. **Jean Gearon, PhD**, of the VISN 5 MIRECC presented sobering data on the vulnerability of women with serious mental illness and substance use disorders to physical and sexual abuse. Though clinicians and researchers will continue to face difficult challenges in trying to understand and help women with substance use disorders, this day-long conference provided a wealth of information and ideas that we hope all of the

attendees will find useful in their professional roles. Next year's conference will expand on Dr. Gearon's talk and focus on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Women. Watch for more information in future issues of this newsletter and at

<http://www.va.gov/visn5mirecc/>.

MENTAL ILLNESS: WORKING TOWARDS RECOVERY CONFERENCE

Submitted by Cynthia Clark, RN

The fifth in our series of family conferences for veterans with mental illness and their families was held on Saturday, May 8, 2004. Veterans from the Baltimore and Perry Point facilities, their family members and concerned significant others attended "Mental Illness: Working Toward Recovery", held at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. Also on hand was a production crew filming portions of the conference for inclusion in an educational DVD entitled, "Involving Families: Improving Care For Individuals With Schizophrenia". (For more information about the DVD, see the MIRECC Matters April, 2004 issue at www.va.gov/visn5mirecc/.)

Tony Lehman, MD, MPH, kicked off the day by speaking about the importance of family involvement in the treatment process. His presentation sparked many questions and comments from family members about their experiences with treatment. Steve Baker, a consultant and trainer in the area of supportive employment, followed with vital information about veterans with a serious mental illness returning to the work world. Next, **Jeanne Greiner, MA**, a VA vocational rehabilitation counselor, discussed various

VA programs available to veterans, and led a consumer panel discussion involving three veterans and job site managers. Finally, Bette Stewart presented information about the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill's (NAMI) Family-to-Family education program.

On October 18, 2004, we will hold a conference for clinicians titled, "Working With Families Of The Mentally Ill: Meeting The Challenges And Reaping The Rewards". See the Upcoming Events section below for further details, and keep an eye on this newsletter for information about the next conference for vets and their families.

MIRECC WALKS FOR THE MIND OF AMERICA

Submitted by Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS

Ever see a dog walking for charity? Well, MIRECC staff members and their significant others – including plenty of the four-legged kind – were excited to have the opportunity to take part in the second annual NAMI Walks for the Mind of America fund-raising walk, held on Sunday, May 2, 2004. All of the money raised at the Walk will go to support NAMI Maryland's programs. The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) is a grassroots, self-help, support, educational and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with severe mental illnesses. Worth Magazine has named NAMI one of the "Top 100 Charities Most Likely To Save the World", and Team MIRECC was glad to do their part toward that end.

This year we had 25 walkers (we didn't count the dogs) complete the 2.4-mile route around Centennial Park in Ellicott City, Maryland, and we raised a grand total of \$1,875.00. Helping to increase the donations was a great new feature on the NAMI website that allowed people to donate to our team online.

The MIRECC team will be showing up in force at next year's Walk, so if you would like to join us, or make a contribution, just let us know. If you would like more information about NAMI, go to <http://www.nami.org>.

HOMELESSNESS AND SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS: FROM THE STREETS TO RECOVERY CONFERENCE 2004

Submitted by Aaron Murray-Swank, PhD

We are all aware that homelessness among veterans is a growing, significant problem. Along with VISNs 3 and 4, the VISN 5 MIRECC recently sponsored a conference focusing on improving services for homeless veterans with serious mental illness (SMI). "Homelessness and Serious Mental Illness: From the Streets to Recovery" was held April 27-28 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The conference opened with a welcoming address by Frances Murphy, MD, MPH, the VA Deputy Under Secretary for Health Care Policy Coordination. Following that address, expert speakers provided an interesting range of presentations, including: developing interventions for homeless populations, vocational rehabilitation programs, substance abuse and medical comorbidities, recovery-oriented services, medication issues, and legal and policy issues. Our MIRECC was very involved in the conference, as **Drs. Paul Ruskin** and **John Junginger** served on the planning committee, and a number of MIRECC investigators and post-doctoral fellows took advantage of this excellent training opportunity.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF THE VISN 5 MIRECC TEAM

Deb Medoff, PhD, joined the MIRECC and the Division of Services Research from the Inpatient Program at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. She received her PhD in Quantitative Psychology from the University of Maryland, College Park in 1989. She will be working closely with Clay Brown, PhD, to provide statistical support services to MIRECC investigators. She collaborated with several MIRECC investigators while at the MPRC and will be a familiar face to many.

Two new staff have come on board to help expand Dr. Lisa Dixon's studies "Does a Critical Time Intervention (CTI) Improve Psychiatric Inpatient-Outpatient Transition Outcomes?" and "Housing, Mental Health, and Employment Outcomes for

Homeless Veterans” to Washington D.C. and Martinsburg, WV. We welcome **Cody Duckworth, MA**, who is a Research Assistant located at the Martinsburg WV VA Medical Center. In addition to working on those two vital studies, she has also proven invaluable as a liaison between the MIRECC and the Martinsburg VAMC. Cody graduated with a Master’s degree in Clinical Psychology from Towson University in 2001. **Melissa Smith, MSW**, received her Master of Social Work degree from the University of MD, Baltimore School of Social Work in 2001. She has worked as a project manager for a substance abuse research and consulting firm in Bethesda, MD, and as a Research Assistant for Johns Hopkins Univ./Potomac Healthcare Foundation. She is currently at the Washington VAMC working on the CTI and Homelessness studies. In addition, Melissa will soon help launch a study entitled, “Evaluating a Bio-Terrorism Preparedness Campaign for Veterans” (PI: **Howard Schulman, PhD**).

Katrina Spencer, MA, joins us as a Study Coordinator for Dr. Alan Bellack’s and Dr. Dwight Dickinson’s cognitive remediation studies. Katrina received her Master’s degree in Clinical Psychology from Loyola College in 1997. Prior to coming to the MIRECC, she worked for Battelle Centers for Public Health Research and Evaluation as a Senior Study Leader. As Study Leader, she was responsible for managing multiple public health research projects for a number of diverse clients, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. Katrina currently volunteers as both a personal counselor and hotline crisis counselor at the House of Ruth in Baltimore.

Tiffany Hiob, MA, joins the MIRECC as a Research Assistant, primarily to conduct neuropsychological assessments and cognitive remediation sessions for Dr. Alan Bellack’s and Dr. Dwight Dickinson’s cognitive remediation studies. Tiffany obtained a Master’s degree in Community Counseling Psychology and will complete her MA in Experimental Research Psychology in December 2004. Her Master’s thesis is on preventative health behaviors and HIV.

GOOD-BYE AND THANKS

Research Assistants **Amy Buchanan** (Baltimore) and **Tameca Jackson** (Perry Point) recently left the MIRECC to pursue graduate degrees, and **Joy Minchew** (Baltimore) left to start a career in fashion design. We want to acknowledge them for their hard work and wish them success in their new endeavors.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Best Practices in Network Mental Healthcare Systems

June 24-25, 2004

Location: Royal Sonesta Hotel Boston, MA (located in Cambridge)

Presented by the Dept. of Veterans Affairs Employee Education System & The VA New England Healthcare Network

This 12-hour program is designed for mental health providers and practitioners which will allow for intensive information sharing amongst networks on the current state of VISN-based best practices in mental health systems.

For more information, go to <http://vaww.ees.lrn.va.gov/>

Working with Families of the Mentally Ill: Meeting the Challenges and Reaping the Rewards

October 18, 2004

Location: Maritime Institute, Linthicum Heights, MD

This one day conference will focus on the importance of family involvement and partnership with clinicians in the treatment of mental illness. National and local experts will address evidence-based practice models including MacFarland's Family Psycho-Education Model and NAMI's Family-to-Family Program, and will include a forum for consumers to address issues of families using the mental health care system.

For more information and registration, go to www.chepinc.org. Click on the conferences tab, and then on "Working with Families of the Mentally Ill: Meeting the Challenges and Reaping the Rewards."

Maryland Schizophrenia Conference

November 16, 2005

Martin's West, Baltimore, Maryland

For program information and fees, go to <http://www.mdschizconf.org>.

Women and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Spring 2005

Baltimore metro area

National MIRECC Conference

June 5-8, 2005

New Orleans, Louisiana

Management of Violence in a Psychiatric Setting

Fall 2005

Near the Martinsburg, West Virginia VA Medical Center
