

# 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 CHAIR

### Advisory Board a Success

*Submitted by Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP*

Our annual External Advisory Board meeting was held at the Baltimore VA Medical Center on May 05, 2005, a day highlighted by a hospital-wide test of the emergency power system.

External Advisors in attendance were: Thomas Horvath, MD, Chief of Staff, Houston VAMC; Miklos Losonczy, MD, Acting Chief of Staff, VA New Jersey Health Care System, VISN 3 MIRECC; Ira Katz, MD, Director, VISN 4 MIRECC; Greer Sullivan, MD, Director, VISN 16 MIRECC; Stephen Marder, MD, Director, VISN 22 MIRECC; Fred Blow, PhD, Director, Serious Mental Illness Treatment Research and Evaluation Center, Ann Arbor VA Medical Center; Barbara Bellack, MS, MPH, Director of NAMI Maryland, and Connie Walker, Captain, US Navy (Retired) and family member advocate. In addition to a full complement of MIRECC Investigators, in attendance were James Nocks, MD, Network Director, VISN 5; Nara Simhan, MD, Chief Medical Officer, VISN 5; Dorothy Snow, MD, Acting Executive Chief of Staff, VA Maryland Health Care System, and Dave Johnson, PhD, Acting Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development, VA Maryland Health Care System.

A major focus of our presentation was on the *centeredness* of the VISN 5 MIRECC. MIRECC Director, **Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP**,

provided an initial overview and orientation for the day, and highlighted our success in generating new investigators. Notably, four MIRECC investigators currently have VA (**Sarah Morris, PhD, and Dwight Dickinson, PhD**) or NIH (**Richard Goldberg, PhD, and Julie Kreyenbuhl, PharmD, PhD**) Career Development awards, and a fifth (**Wendy Tenhula, PhD**) has progressed from a Merit Review Entry Program Grant to a regular VA MERIT Grant. **Lisa Dixon, MD, MPH**, Associate Director, MIRECC Research Core, then presented an overview of our research portfolio. She highlighted our success in translating clinical and research technologies across areas of expertise and collaborating on interdisciplinary projects. For example, Drs. Alan Bellack and Melanie Bennett currently have behavioral treatment grants from NIDA and NIAAA, respectively, that employ *Critical Time Intervention* strategies first tested by Dr. Lisa Dixon in a health services project funded by VA HSR&D. Drs. Lisa Dixon, Melanie Bennett, and Robert Buchanan are working on a smoking cessation treatment that combines a health services intervention with pharmacotherapy, and a behavioral intervention. Currently, all MIRECC investigators have external funding and almost every project involves a collaborative effort and combines techniques from different areas of specialization.

Following Dr. Dixon's presentation, several MIRECC investigators presented on different parts of our research portfolio, including: **Eric Slade, PhD** on health services and economics, **Wendy Tenhula, PhD** on psychosocial

interventions and functional outcomes, **Jim Gold, PhD**, on clinical and translational cognitive studies, **Nina Schooler, PhD** on psychopharmacology, **Robert Conley, MD** on an exciting new partnership with the NIDA intramural program, and **Robert Buchanan, MD** on the development of novel approaches for the treatment of cognition and negative symptoms. **Paul Ruskin, MD**, Associate Director of the MIRECC Education Core, reviewed ways in which the Core has positively influenced clinical services at the VA Maryland Health Care System, and showed a segment from the DVD the MIRECC is developing on the involvement of family members in care for people with schizophrenia. To complete the day, **Richard Goldberg, PhD**, Associate Director of the MIRECC Clinical Core, provided an overview of accomplishments of that Core, including work that **Alicia Lucksted, PhD** has been doing to advance the *Recovery Model* and recovery-oriented services throughout VISN 5.

We are pleased to report that the Advisory Board was uniformly enthusiastic about our work, praising both our science and our success in forging partnerships with VISN 5 and the Mental Health Service Line in a collaborative effort to improve care for veterans with schizophrenia and other severe mental illnesses.

In addition to the presenters, thanks are due to **Mary Lupi, Fran Broomall, Sabrina Railey** and our enthusiastic research staff for working so hard to make the day a success, despite the 4-hour power outage. Special kudos to those who helped guide our visitors to the restrooms with flashlights!!

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## **THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION TO CHANGE SUBSTANCE USE IN SCHIZOPHRENIA PATIENTS**

*Submitted by Joanna Strong-Kinnaman, PhD*

More than 50% of schizophrenia patients experience substance use disorders in their lifetime. The effects of substance abuse for these individuals include more severe symptoms of schizophrenia, more frequent hospitalizations, and poorer retention in and adherence to treatment. While it is clear that substance use is highly prevalent and detrimental, less is known about the factors that contribute to drug use and ways to help schizophrenia patients reduce their drug use. We recently examined some of these issues in Dr. Alan S. Bellack's NIDA-funded protocol, *The Process of Change in Substance Abuse by Schizophrenics*.

In substance users who do not have schizophrenia, motivation to change plays an important role in reducing drug use and participating in substance abuse treatment. However, motivation can be difficult to assess with schizophrenia patients. Self-report measures used with non-schizophrenia patients are verbally demanding and ask hypothetical questions. The Wells Cartoon Stage of Change Measure (Wells et al., 1998) provides ratings of readiness to change substance use with a simple cartoon format. One component of Dr. Bellack's study was to examine whether this cartoon measure is better suited for schizophrenia patients.

Participants were individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia and either concurrent cocaine dependence (n = 68) or remitted cocaine dependence (n = 51). They were patients from outpatient mental health clinics affiliated with the Baltimore VA Medical Center and the Division of Psychiatry of the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

Results suggest that motivation to change is related to schizophrenia patients' drug use and treatment involvement. Schizophrenia patients are able to provide information about their motivation to reduce drug use, but the assessment format is critical. The cartoon format may be better suited for patients with cognitive deficits. Since this is one of the first studies with

the cartoon measure, more studies should be conducted to replicate these findings. Future research should also consider how cartoon formats may generalize to other assessment instruments.

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## NATIONAL MIRECC CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

*Submitted by Aaron Murray-Swank, PhD*

The National MIRECC 2005 Conference was held June 6-8, 2005 in New Orleans, Louisiana. The focus of this year's conference was to: 1) present evidence-based research about suicide assessment, dual diagnosis, recovery models, and treating deployed veterans as mandated by the President's New Freedom Commission; 2) promote development and dissemination of empirically supported interventions; and 3) provide training and professional development for MIRECC Fellows. In a series of keynote addresses, prominent leaders within the VA highlighted the important role of the MIRECCs in creating a "system transformation" in mental health care, which is the centerpiece of the President's New Freedom Commission Report. Special attention was devoted to issues of suicide assessment, the Recovery Model, and the care of returning OEF/OIF veterans.

Several VISN 5 MIRECC staff participated, including **Alan S. Bellack, PhD, Paul Ruskin, MD, Joanna Strong-Kinnaman, PhD, and Aaron Murray-Swank, PhD**. Dr. Bellack delivered an address, "Implementing a Recovery Model for Veterans with Serious Mental Illness", which outlined the initial recommendations of the VA Recovery Workgroup he led during the past year. MIRECC Fellows (Drs. Strong-Kinnaman and Murray-Swank) presented their research at a Fellows' poster session and participated in other career development activities included in the conference program.

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## UNDERSTANDING AND TREATING PTSD IN WOMEN: 4TH ANNUAL VISN 5 MIRECC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

*Submitted by Amanda Flood, PhD*

The 4th Annual VISN 5 MIRECC Women's Conference was held on May 16, 2005, at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel. This year's topic was Women and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with a particular focus on intervention strategies for diverse female trauma populations. Rachel Kimerling, PhD, Research Psychologist at the National Center for PTSD, Palo Alto VAMC, started the day with an overview of gender differences in PTSD, highlighting how the concept of PTSD has been implicitly shaped by gender (e.g., "combat stress" vs. "rape trauma syndrome") and presenting different models to explain these gender differences and inform gender-sensitive assessment and diagnosis. Many of the later presentations continued to elaborate on these gender differences and their clinical implications. Paula Schnurr, PhD, Deputy Director of the National Center for PTSD, White River Junction VAMC, discussed the physical health outcomes in female trauma survivors, possible mechanisms for the relationship between trauma and physical health. Next, **Sonja Batten, PhD**, MIRECC Investigator and Coordinator of the Trauma Recovery Programs for the VA Maryland Health Care System, spoke on issues related to the comorbidity of PTSD and substance use disorders in women. After the lunch break, Mindy Mechanic, PhD, Associate Professor, California State University, Fullerton, and Mary Ann Dutton, PhD, Research Professor, Georgetown University Medical Center, led a panel discussion on intimate partner violence. Data from longitudinal research were reviewed that demonstrated the patterns of PTSD symptoms in female trauma survivors following intimate partner violence. Finally, Candice Monson, PhD, Deputy Director of the Women's Health Sciences Division of the National Center for PTSD at VA Boston Health Care System,

summarized the issues of assessment and treatment of women with PTSD. She described the current research on PTSD interventions and which treatments have received the most empirical support. In sum, 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 in dealing with female trauma survivors. Thanks to all of those people who contributed to the conference and made it such a successful and informative day for everyone.

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### **MIRECC WALKS FOR THE MIND OF AMERICA**

The MIRECC was proud to participate once again in the NAMI (The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) Walks for the Mind of America fund-raising walk, held on Sunday, May 1, 2005. Never known to be shy, Team MIRECC showed up in force with 30 walkers in vivid orange t-shirts, plus one bright yellow flag, for the 2.4-mile walk around the lake in Centennial Park, Ellicott City, Maryland. Fun and exercise were had by all, and we were able to contribute \$1,905.00 to benefit NAMI Maryland this year. Next year: day-glo t-shirts?? Stay tuned!

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### **CONGRATS ARE IN ORDER!**

The MIRECC would like to congratulate **William Carpenter, MD**, Director of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, for his appointment as President-Elect of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology – a significant honor by one of the most prestigious scientific organizations in the field of psychiatry!

Congratulations also to **Anthony Lehman, MD**, for winning the 2005 Galnick Award for Research in Schizophrenia from the American Psychiatric Association.

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### **WELCOME TO NEW MIRECC STAFF**

**Angela DeSantis, MA**, recently joined the MIRECC as a Research Assistant. Angi has seven years experience working with severe mental illness in a variety of settings, including inpatient hospitals, partial hospitalization programs, research, corrections, and residential treatment centers. Previously, she worked as a Study Coordinator at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, managing research protocols and conducting neuro-imaging studies of neural activity related to antipsychotic medication in volunteers with schizophrenia. Angi will be a therapist for the MIRECC's Cognitive Remediation studies.

**Noah Isserman, BA**, also came on board as a Research Assistant. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a degree in Psychology in 2003. At UNC, he assisted with research studies examining social cognition in schizophrenia. After graduation, he worked in a neuroscience laboratory at the UNC Medical School. Noah will be conducting neuropsychological assessments for several MIRECC research projects.

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### **GOOD-BYE AND THANKS**

Research Assistants **Paula Gonce, Brett Munjas** and **Valene Whittaker** will be leaving the MIRECC in June and July. Paula will be staying in the area to pursue another career opportunity, Brett will be relocating to Texas, and Valene will be attending graduate school in Illinois. We want to thank them for their hard work and wish them all the best in their future endeavors.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Family Support and Education Program**

June 25, 2005

10:00 – 11:30 AM

Baltimore VA Medical Center, Room 2B-136

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 Saturday 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 if you have any questions about the program, please contact Dr. Aaron Murray-Swank by phone: (410) 605-7000, ext. 4756, or email: [aaron.murray-swank@med.va.gov](mailto:aaron.murray-swank@med.va.gov).

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### **13<sup>th</sup> Annual Maryland Schizophrenia Conference**

November 1, 2005

8:30 AM – 4:30 PM

Martin's West

6817 Dogwood Road, Baltimore

E-Mail: [MDSchizConf@mprc.umaryland.edu](mailto:MDSchizConf@mprc.umaryland.edu)

Web Site: [www.mdschizconf.org](http://www.mdschizconf.org)

On-line registration Starts September 1, 2005