

THE VISN 5 MIRECC UPDATE

An Electronic Publication of the VA Capitol Health Care Network
(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP, Director, VISN 5 MIRECC

It is hard to believe, but by the time you read this we will have had our first birthday! This has been a truly exciting year in which we have created a dynamic and productive center from scratch. With completion of construction and arrival of our new furniture, we have a real and beautiful presence at the Baltimore VAMC (kudos to Mary Ellen Moore, Interior Designer, for her artistic sense and hard work). More importantly, we have nine active research protocols in operation, have initiated a number of major clinical projects, and have several major conferences and educational programs in the works. Under the leadership of Stephen Deutsch, MD, PhD, we are developing a world class clinical and research center at Perry Point VAMC. We are especially excited about the new Behavioral Management Program, which will begin on November 1, 2000. We have been able to recruit several excellent trainees, including Dwight Dickinson, PhD, who has already received an Associate Investigator Grant. We are still in our initial growth phase and are recruiting for several additional investigators and support staff. We currently have two MERIT grant applications under review and expect our team to have several more submissions during the coming year. We will soon be starting major new initiatives on smoking, diabetes, and hepatitis C, and will be initiating several pharmacological trials.

External validation of our progress and performance has come from Tom Horvath, MD, Coordinator and Science Advisor for the MIRECCs. Dr. Horvath was recently here for an informal site visit and gave us a glowing review. Thanks to all who have helped us through this first year, including: James Nocks, MD, VISN 5 Network Director; Dennis Smith, Director, VA Maryland Health Care System; Christine LaGana, PhD, VISN 5 Facility Service Line Manager; Michael Stout, VISN 5 Chief Operations Officer; Sharon Zielinski, Chief, Information and Resource Management Service and her staff; Mary Parks, Chief Human Resources Management and the Human Resources Team; Mary Ellen Moore, Interior Designer; and Richard Iafolla, Chief, Facilities and Engineering Service and all our friends in Engineering.

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FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR'S DESK

Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS, Project Manager, VISN 5 MIRECC

Protection Of Human Subjects

Protecting human research subjects has become a chief national concern and one that is pertinent to all investigators and their staff. Anyone who participates in conducting research on humans, including principal investigators, co-investigators, coordinators, nurses, research assistants and anyone who obtains informed consent, has an obligation to minimize the risks and promote the rights and welfare of human subjects.

As leaders in the field of mental illness research, MIRECC investigators are held to a high standard for the protection of human subjects. We agree that every person engaged in human subject research has an obligation to gain a thorough knowledge of the ethical principles and sound clinical practice that govern human subjects research. To this end, the VISN 5 MIRECC Educational Core staff is monitoring the timely completion of required human subject training to ensure that:

- all investigators and their staff either attended a 2-hour training session given recently by the Baltimore VAMC Research Office, or have viewed the videotape of the session;

· by November 1, 2000, all Baltimore VAMC investigators and their staff have completed a University of Maryland (UMB) hour-long, web-based Basic Training for Research program. Much of this program was extracted from the National Institute of Health (NIH) training program for intramural investigators. It reviews the historical, legal, and ethical foundations for the UMB Multiple Project Assurance (MPA), and presents case studies to demonstrate how the policies and procedures of the UMB MPA are applied in situations which may be encountered by investigators.

· by November 1, 2000, all principal investigators of high risk protocols have completed additional training by studying the textbook Protecting Study Volunteers in Research and taking a test on the material.

After this initial training, the training of new staff will be monitored on a quarterly basis, and we will monitor any future NIH, VA, and University requirements that are mandated.

Finally, the MIRECC will be developing our own supplemental training that is specific to schizophrenia patients. We will also be developing and implementing quality management procedures and guidelines to ensure ongoing evaluation/monitoring of human subjects research.

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VISN 5 MIRECC PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS UPDATE

Women Veterans Needs Assessment

Jean S. Gearon, PhD, Assistant Director, Research Core, VISN 5 MIRECC

One goal of the VISN 5 MIRECC is to improve the quality of care for women veterans with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses (SMI). Research indicates that both women veterans as well as people with SMI are at increased risk for adverse health outcomes, suggesting that SMI women veterans may be particularly susceptible to poor health. An assessment of met and unmet medical and mental health needs is currently being conducted in the Baltimore VAMC Women's Health Clinic as a first step toward improving the quality of care for this vulnerable and often ignored population of women. More specifically, the needs assessment asks women: 1) if a need is present; 2) who helps them with this need; 3) if the need is being met; and 4) how satisfied they feel with the Baltimore VAMCs' help regarding this need. The domains covered include diabetes, breast cancer, headaches, weight issues, family planning, HIV prevention, sexually transmitted diseases, menopause, pregnancy, parenting skills, depression, anxiety, PTSD, social skills, assertiveness, employment, physical and sexual abuse, sexual harassment, smoking, substance abuse, and psychotic experiences. The Brief Symptom Index and a substance abuse screening instrument are also included. This information will be used to help develop targeted treatment programs within the Women's Health Clinic as well as serve as pilot data for a spring MERIT application for funding of a larger longitudinal study focusing more specifically on SMI women veterans health status and health behaviors.

For more information concerning ongoing research and clinical activities with the VISN 5 MIRECC Women's Health program, please contact Jean S. Gearon, PhD at jgearon@umaryland.edu or Andrea Van Horn, CNP at andrea.vanhorn@med.va.gov.

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NEW MEMBERS OF THE VISN 5 MIRECC TEAM

Stacey Kaltman, PhD, joined the MIRECC following the completion of her pre-doctoral internship in behavioral medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. Her research and clinical work was primarily in the area of HIV and focused on factors that undermine and promote medication adherence as well as the secondary prevention of HIV transmission. She recently received her doctorate in clinical psychology from the Catholic University of America. Dr. Kaltman will be working on various research projects related to women's health with Dr. Jean Gearon, and smoking cessation with Dr. Melanie Bennett. In addition to HIV related projects, her previous research has focused on trauma and

bereavement.

Edward Suarez, MA, joins us as a psychology intern in the inaugural year of the joint MIRECC/Perry Point VAMC internship slot. His degree in Clinical Psychology is from the University of Hawaii where he was Project Director of the World Health Organization Honolulu Field Research Center for the International Study of Schizophrenia. His dissertation will be based on the long-term (20 year) follow-up of the Hawaii cohort of this multi-national study of first-episode psychosis. He is playing an integral role in designing and implementing a token economy and social learning program on the new long-term inpatient unit at the Perry Point VAMC.

Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS, recently came on board as a MIRECC Project Manager. She was the Project Coordinator for the Center for the Behavioral Treatment of Schizophrenia at the University of Maryland and previously coordinated a study on schizophrenia and substance abuse at Emory University. She will play an important role as consultant to and liaison for MIRECC investigators on IRB issues, and will take on increasing responsibilities with the Education Core, including the role of Assistant Editor on the VISN 5 MIRECC Update.

Judy Van Der Wende, PhD, joined the MIRECC after completing her pre-doctoral clinical psychology internship at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. She will be conducting assessments and working on several research projects, including a needs assessment of the Day Treatment Program with Dr. Wendy Tenhula, and a needs assessment of dual-diagnosis patients with Dr. Melanie Bennett. Dr. Van Der Wende's past research has been in the areas of coping, medication adherence, and neurocognitive assessment of chronically ill populations.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

October 26, 2000

Case Conference: Sequelae of Trauma

Charles Robinson, M.D. – Presenter – Univ. of MD Medical School

Bethany Brand, Ph.D. – Discussant – Towson University

University of MD School of Medicine/VA Grand Rounds

11:30 AM – 1:00 PM at the VA Hospital, John Dennis Auditorium, 2nd floor

November 8, 2000

Psychotropic Drug Interactions

Deanna L. Kelly, Pharm.D., BCPP

Perry Point VAMC/Maryland Psychiatric Research Center Joint Lecture Series

12:00 PM at the Perry Point VA Hospital, Building 20

Information: Stephanie Feldman, LCSW at 410-402-6885, or sfeldman@mprc.umaryland.edu

November 20, 2000

The 8th Annual Maryland Schizophrenia Conference

Marriott's Hunt Valley Inn, Hunt Valley, MD

Sponsored by the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, NAMI Maryland, Mental Health Assoc. of Maryland

Information at www.mdschizconf.org

December 1, 2000

VISN 1 MIRECC/Boston University School Of Medicine Conference:

Current Treatment for Persons with Schizophrenia: An Update

Officers Club at Hanscom Air Force Base

Building 1425 Kirtland St., Bedford, MA 01731

Questions? Call 781-687-2045

December 2-3, 2000

VISN 22 MIRECC Fall Conference
Psychosis Does Not Stand Alone: Issues In Co-Morbidity
LaJolla Marriott, San Diego, CA
Information at www.mirecc.org

March 27-29, 2001
Schizophrenia: Scientific, Clinical, and Economic Challenges to the VA
Turf Valley Resort and Conference Center, Ellicott City, Maryland
Sponsored by NAVAPAL
Co-sponsored by the VISN 5 MIRECC

April 2, 2001
Assessment and Treatment of Psychosis and Behavioral Problems in Dementia
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center (NCTC)
(10 miles from the Martinsburg W. VA VAMC)
Sponsored by the VISN 5 MIRECC

September 17, 2001
Schizophrenia, Race & Ethnicity
Sponsored by the VISN 5 MIRECC
Watch for further details in upcoming issues

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Reminder: The deadline for submission of items to the December Update is November 27, 2000. Items may be emailed either to Richard Goldberg, PhD at Richard.Goldberg@med.va.gov or Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS at Shannon.Thomas-Lohrman@med.va.gov. Dr Goldberg can also be reached by telephone at (410) 605-7465 or (410) 706-2490. Ms. Thomas-Lohrman can be reached by telephone at 410-605-7000, x 4733.

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