

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 DESK

The tragedy of September 11, 2001 is still fresh in our minds as we prepare this issue of the newsletter in early October. Fortunately, we did not lose any of our staff or immediate family members, but it does not take many conversations to discover a colleague, friend, or family member who knows someone who died or somehow escaped. Simple social niceties such as How are you? still stimulate comments about lingering dysphoria and concerns about the future. While I have not seen any data, conversations with colleagues confirm that many patients are suffering from the stress of the events and endless television coverage as well.

The one concrete effect of September 11th on us was the cancellation of our Advisory Committee meeting on September 13, 2001. We have rescheduled the meeting for October 29, 2001. From our original list of invitees, Larry Siever, MD, Director VISN 3 MIRECC, Nina Schooler, PhD, Director of Psychiatry Research at Hillside Hospital, and Robert Rosenheck, MD, Director VA Northeast Program Evaluation Center and Professor of Psychiatry and Public Health, Yale University, will still be able to participate. Ira Katz, MD, PhD, an old friend and colleague of mine from Philadelphia and now Director of the VISN 4 MIRECC, has graciously agreed to step in for Matthew Friedman, MD, PhD.

Things are otherwise proceeding apace. The construction project to expand our suite is moving along and we should be able to begin moving some of our staff shortly. This is not a moment too soon, as **John Junginger, PhD**, Director of the Assessment Core, came on board in late August, **Ye Yang, MS** joined our biostatistics team in early September, and **Sarah Morris, PhD**, a clinical psychologist, is a new Post-doctoral Fellow. **Dora Shorter, MA**, is a new addition to our research staff who will be spending much of her time at Perry Point working on Dr. Wendy Tenhula's MERIT II grant on *Generalization of Training in Schizophrenia*. **Matthew Nelson, PharmD**, joined our team after working for the VISN 5 Mental Health Service Line, and **Cenk Tek, MD**, has recently come on board as medical director of 364A at Perry Point. **Rob Conley, MD**, will be working with Matt and Cenk as the Director of MIRECC Research on that unit. Finally, **Dwight Dickinson, PhD**, **Wendy Tenhula, PhD**, and **Judy Van der Wende, PhD**, were just awarded a Baltimore Research and Education Foundation grant to support the development of a computer based cognitive rehabilitation program.

Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP

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PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS UPDATE

VISN 5 MIRECC CONFERENCES: OUR FIRST YEAR AND BEYOND

*Submitted by Paul Ruskin, MD
Associate Director Education Core*

You have seen numerous articles in this newsletter about the innovative and rigorous research undertaken by VISN 5 MIRECC scientists in order to learn more about schizophrenia and to best treat the veterans who suffer from this serious disorder. Although our understanding of schizophrenia is increasing and new knowledge about effective treatments is rapidly emerging, ensuring the translation of research findings into everyday practice is an ongoing challenge. For the mentally ill veteran to receive the highest quality of treatment, there must be this critical bridge between research science and service level care.

As part of the overall MIRECC mission of improving the quality of services for veterans with schizophrenia and their families, the VISN 5 MIRECC Education Core has been charged with developing a multi-faceted program of education, training, and community networking. One aspect of the program is an ongoing series of conferences that reach a wide variety of people, such as general medical and mental health professionals, veterans living with schizophrenia and their families, and community-based advocacy and support staff working with veterans. These conferences are designed to offer practical clinical information based on sound research findings. To date, the MIRECC has sponsored two highly successful conferences and is planning for three more in 2002.

With the aging of the veteran population, VA facilities are seeing an increasing number of patients with dementia. Agitation and psychosis are very common in these patients, and often difficult to treat. The first MIRECC conference rose to the challenge of presenting a comprehensive approach to the evaluation and management of these patients at the "Assessment and Management of Psychosis and Agitation in Dementia" conference. Nationally known speakers presented the most recent pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches to a capacity audience of over 250.

"Speaking the Unspoken: Racial Disparities in Mental Health Care for African Americans with Schizophrenia" was particularly relevant to local providers since VISN 5 has one of the largest percentages of minority patients of any VISN in the nation. A detailed article about this conference can be found in the Conferences Update section of this newsletter.

On April 15, 2002, we will be presenting our first annual Women and Schizophrenia conference. There is a tremendous need for this conference, because although the number of women veterans continues to increase, there has been a lag in effective treatment programs for this unique population. Internationally known speakers will cover such topics as gender differences in course and illness presentation, the use of antipsychotic and other psychotropic medications, reproductive issues, genetic counseling, and sexual and physical victimization. Other planned events include an address by a consumer, a panel discussion with our speakers, and poster presentations.

A second 2002 conference, entitled "Schizophrenia and the Criminal Justice System", is scheduled for next fall. Unfortunately, veterans with schizophrenia frequently have contact with the criminal justice system - with police officers, in the courts, in jails and in prisons. Attendees at this conference will learn about model programs for better collaboration between police and mental health workers, diversion of mentally ill patients from prison to treatment programs, programs in prisons and jails, and community re-entry for the mentally ill veteran. We are confident that this conference will act as a stimulus to increase the ties between VISN 5 and community re-entry programs. In this way, the care of these veterans will be enhanced and future incarceration may be prevented.

Finally, in the fall of 2002, the MIRECC will sponsor a conference focusing on Dual Diagnosis issues. Any provider who works with veterans with severe mental illnesses knows that substance abuse is common

among these patients. Management and treatment of either mental illness or substance abuse is difficult in itself, and treating veterans with both of these disorders simultaneously is among the greatest challenges we face as mental health providers. At this conference, national and local experts will present the latest information on treatment for this challenging population.

The MIRECC is committed to presenting conferences with vital clinical relevance to VA providers so that all of us can better care for veterans with severe and chronic mental illnesses. If you have ideas for future conference topics, please contact Dr. Paul Ruskin, at Paul.Ruskin@med.va.gov.

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CONFERENCE UPDATE

SPEAKING THE UNSPOKEN: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA

Submitted by Alicia Lucksted, Ph.D.

The September 17, 2001 VISN 5 MIRECC conference, "Speaking the Unspoken: Racial Disparities in Mental Health Care for African Americans with Schizophrenia" was a tremendous success. The conference drew approximately 300 national and regional attendees, both VA and non-VA, of various roles and disciplines. Many front-line providers attended, as well as researchers, consumers, advocates, family members, and administrators. The program featured three speakers who addressed the entire conference body, a choice of four afternoon workshops, a poster display, and a closing speaker and reception. These different presentation formats combined solid scientific evidence with articulate theoretical and applied analyses.

Dr. Harold Neighbors of the University of Michigan kicked off the conference with his talk, "Psychopathology and the Diagnosis of African Americans: DSM Criteria, Clinical Judgment, and Cultural Context." Next, Dr. Annelle Primm of Hopkins University spoke on *Cultural Issues in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Schizophrenia in African American*. Capping the morning session, Dr. Arthur Whaley of City University of NY Medical School presented "Racism, Paranoia, and Diagnoses of Schizophrenia in African Americans."

After lunch, attendees chose between four workshops: (1) "'You People' - Racism and Stigma in Mental Health Programs" presented interactively by Jennifer Brown of On Our Own of Maryland, Inc., and Dr. Marilyn Martin of Maryland Health Partners, (2) "Supplementing the Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health: Culture Counts...but is the glass half empty or half full?" led by Oscar Morgan, Director of the Mental Hygiene Administration, (3) "That Old White Magic" by Dr. Frank Katz and Dr. Leroy Bell, both from the VAMHCS, and (4) "Connecting Components of Culturally Competent Care: Providers, Church, and Family" presented by Bette Stewart of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Dr. Robin Hindsman of the VAMHCS and Dr. Michael Torres of Universal Counseling Services.

Finally, Dr. William Lawson, Chairman of Psychiatry at Howard University's College of Medicine, drew the days' issues and themes together with his talk entitled "African Americans and Schizophrenia: Overcoming the Barriers to Providing Quality Care in the VA and Beyond". During the closing reception, attendees expressed appreciation for the depth and quality of the program and the opportunity to meet with others interested in addressing the problems of racism and other disparities in mental health services, both within the VA service lines and in the wider community.

A summary of the content of these presentations is in preparation. If you are interested in receiving one when they are ready, please contact Dr. Richard Goldberg at rgoldber@psych.umaryland.edu or 410-706-2490.

MENTAL ILLNESS: A FAMILY DILEMMA

Submitted by Cindy Clark, RNC, CD

On October 2, 2001 the VISN 5 MIRECC and the Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM) team held a conference entitled "Mental Illness: A Family Dilemma" at the Baltimore VAMC. We were pleased to welcome 43 family members and friends of veterans who are receiving mental health care in the VA system to the half-day conference and luncheon.

Dr. John Butchart, Medical Director of the MHICM team, started the morning with an overview of the mental health services available in the Baltimore and Perry Point VA systems. Dr. Lisa Dixon, MIRECC Associate Director for Research, then spoke about the symptoms and treatments of serious mental illnesses, and answered questions from the audience. Bette Stewart, NAMI-Maryland State Director of the Family to Family Education Program, discussed community support and resources for families, and Dr. Alicia Lucksted presented the results of the MIRECC family needs assessment. Finally, Dr. Diana Seybolt presented an overview of family-oriented research in the VA. A question and discussion session was held before the conference broke for lunch.

Feedback on the conference (both verbal and via written evaluation forms) was very positive. The attendees expressed appreciation for Dr. Butchart's overview of available services and high praise for Dr. Dixon's presentation, both for the informative value and for her personal touch. Many families indicated that they intend to enroll in the Family to Family Education Program after listening to Bette Stewart's presentation. They also expressed interest in future conferences that would cover issues about dual diagnosis, patient and family rights, medication, and ways that families can be appropriately supportive in the treatment and recovery process.

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WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF THE VISN 5 MIRECC TEAM

Ye Yang, MS, the newest member of our biostatistics team, tells us that she came to the career she has today in a "roundabout way". After graduating from medical school in Shanghai, China, she worked on medical information for an academic society and pharmaceuticals company. After she came to the United States, Ye (pronounced "Yay") obtained her Master's degree in biostatistics in 2001 from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. At UAB, she conducted data analysis for a Center for Disease Control funded Special Interest Project entitled "Peer Support Intervention for Cardiovascular Risk among African-American Women, Aged 40 and Older". Ye will be working closely with Dr. Clay Brown, the MIRECC's lead biostatistician.

Sarah Morris, PhD, joined the MIRECC as a Post-doctoral fellow after completing her pre-doctoral clinical psychology internship at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center and graduating from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research has focused on emotion and self-monitoring in schizophrenia, using measures of central and autonomic nervous system activation. She will be working on various research and clinical projects, including the development of a cognitive rehabilitation program, with Dr. Alan S. Bellack and other MIRECC investigators.

Matthew Nelson, PharmD, BCPP, came on board after three years as the Clinical Pharmacist, Mental Health at Perry Point. Matt received his Pharmacy doctorate at Medical University of South Carolina and completed his Psychiatric Pharmacy Practice Residency at the University of Maryland Baltimore. He is the primary site investigator in several drug efficacy studies at Perry Point with Dr. Rob Conley and will be managing the medication for the seriously mentally ill patients in the Domiciliary Care for Homeless

Veterans Program. He also recently received a grant along with Dr. Conley and Dr. Dwight Dickinson to study *Galantamine as an Adjunctive Therapy for the Treatment of Schizophrenia*.

Doraethia Shorter, MA comes to us from a background of working with the disadvantaged and those with serious mental illnesses. She obtained her psychology degree from Washington College and was the Program Manager and a case manager for the Kent Family Support Center, which provides services to teen parents and their children. She has also worked as a Rehabilitation Specialist at Crossroads Community, Inc, a psychosocial day program for individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia. Dora is a Capella University-Industrial Organizational Psychology Doctoral candidate and a member of the International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Practitioners.

A belated welcome to **Dan J. Nieberding, MS, LCPC** who joined the MIRECC team earlier this year. He obtained his Master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Loyola College in 1998 and began work at Partners in Recovery, where he developed and implemented an adolescent addictions treatment program. He currently serves as a therapist for the Evaluation of Behavioral Treatment for Substance Abuse in Schizophrenia study and recruits patients for various MIRECC studies. Dan will also be working with Dr. Will Carpenter on a study investigating the ability of people with schizophrenia to provide informed consent for research studies.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

November 13, 2001

1:00 pm-5:00 pm

9th Annual Maryland Schizophrenia Conference

Location: Martin's West, 6817 Dogwood Road, Baltimore, MD

CME credits available for: Physicians, Psychologists, Nurses, Social Workers, Therapists/counselors

For more information:

Contact Toni Tinnirella at 410-402-6051 or ttinnire@mprc.umaryland.edu

Or visit www.mdschizconf.org

April 15, 2002

Women and Schizophrenia

Location: Turf Valley Resort and Conference Center, Ellicott City, Maryland

This one-day conference will focus on important issues related to women with schizophrenia including: gender differences in illness course and presentation, the use of anti-psychotic medications and other psychotropic medications, sexual and physical victimization, and reproductive issues including genetic counseling. There will be a poster session with a \$150 award for Outstanding Poster.

For more information, contact Stacey Kaltman at 410-605-7000 x 4734 or skaltman@psych.umaryland.edu.

Fall, 2002

Dual Diagnosis Conference

Location: near the Martinsburg, W. Virginia VAMC

Watch upcoming issues for further details.

Fall, 2002

Schizophrenia and the Criminal Justice System

Location: To be announced

Watch upcoming issues for further details.