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Resisting Internalized Stigma Intervention

Submitted by Christine Calmes, PhD

Negative beliefs and attitudes about mental illness are prevalent and exposure to stigma and discrimination is common for people with mental illness. Stigma can lead to a wide range of negative outcomes, including social isolation, curtailed housing and employment opportunities, and inadequate physical and mental health care. In addition, the effects of stigma include “internalized stigma” or self-stigma. This refers to the process in which a person with mental illness cognitively or emotionally absorbs the negative messages, believes them and applies them to him/herself. An example of internalized stigma would be if a person believes that he/she will never be able to work again because of the mental illness. Over time, internalized stigma can contribute to decreased morale and self-esteem among individuals with serious mental illness.

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Peer Support Technician Presentations

Submitted by Karen Wilson, BSN, MHA

A total of 107 veterans and staff attended Peer Support Technician presentations at the Baltimore and Perry Point VAMCs in February 2009. The highlight of both events was speaker Gina Kaye Calhoun, Certified Peer Specialist, from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. Ms. Calhoun, a consumer of mental health services, shared her story of becoming a Certified Peer Specialist, working for the same program from which she had previously received services. She defined for the audience the role of the Peer Support Technician (PST) and the value of having a PST as an integral part of a Mental Health Clinical Center team. An engaging and dynamic speaker, Ms. Calhoun inspired enthusiasm and support for the first PST staff positions to be announced in the VAMHCS. Coincidentally, as the program was being presented, Human Resources posted two PST positions for the PRRCs in Baltimore and Perry Point. These successful presentations were supported by a VISN 5 MIRECC Small Grant award for Recovery-Fostering Educational and Clinical Innovations.

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Resisting Internalized Stigma (RIS) is a nine-session course designed by a UMB and MIRECC-based team (Lucksted, Drapalski, Calmes, DeForge, Forbes, and Goldberg) and Dr. Jennifer Boyd at the San Francisco VA, who created an internationally-accepted measure of internalized stigma. RIS is grounded in cognitive-behavioral theory as well as empowerment and recovery-oriented principles, and the goal of the course is to introduce coping skills and techniques to help individuals recognize and counter internalized self-stigma. These techniques include: identifying and challenging stigmatizing thoughts and beliefs, strengthening self-concept, increasing sense of belonging by enhancing social connections in healthy ways, and ways to respond to discrimination. With support from VISN 5 MIRECC Pilot Study funding, an investigation examining the feasibility and acceptability of RIS is presently underway. Preliminary results are promising and the internalized stigma research team is in the process of preparing grant applications to conduct randomized controlled trials of the RIS course.

Stigma can lead to social isolation, curtailed housing and employment opportunities, and inadequate physical and mental health care.

Martinsburg Family Support & Wellness Program

Submitted by John P. Foley, PhD, MT-BC

The Family Support and Wellness Program will celebrate its second year at the Martinsburg VAMC on April 29, 2009. Program staff John P. Foley, PhD, MT-BC, and Teresa Bowers, LCSW, have completed training in McFarlane Multifamily Group Therapy (MFG) and Behavioral Family Therapy (Mueser & Glynn). The focus of both models is to aid families in developing improved communication and problem-solving skills. Research on these approaches has shown positive outcomes of decreased hospitalization rates and improved symptom management, social functioning, and quality of life. Dr. Foley has attended advanced MFG training and is working toward becoming a trainer in this approach.

The Family Support and Wellness Program (part of the Family Psychoeducation Program) is located in the Mental Health Outpatient Clinic at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. Since its inception, the Program has evolved to include brief family consultation services, couples and family counseling, a grief support group, assisting families and veterans in connecting with local mental health and other services, and a newly developing social support networks group in the PRRC program. For more information, contact Dr. John Foley at John.Foley@va.gov or 304-263-0811 ext 3119, or Teresa Bowers at teresa.bowers@va.gov or 304-263-0811 ext. 3351.



Recent MIRECC Publications

Sherman, MD, Fischer, EP, Bowling, UB, Dixon, LB, Ridener, L, Harrison, D. (2009). Effectiveness of new engagement strategies in a VA-based family psychoeducation program. *Psychiatric Services*, 60:254-257.

McCarthy JF, Valenstein M, Dixon L, Visnic S, Blow FC, Slade EP (2009). Client and Program Factors Associated With Initiation of Assertive Community Treatment Services Among Veterans With Severe Mental Illness. *Psychiatric Services* 60:196-201

Silverstein, SM, & Bellack, AS (2008). A Scientific Agenda for the Concept of Recovery as it Applies to Schizophrenia. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28, 1108-1124.

Lucksted, A, McNulty, K, Brayboy, L, Forbes, C (2009). Initial Evaluation of the Peer-to-Peer Program. *Psychiatric Services*, 60:250-253.

Tenhula, WN, & Bellack, AS (2008). Social skills training. In KT Mueser & D.V. Jeste (Eds). *Clinical handbook of schizophrenia*. New York: Guilford Press.



Congrats Are In Order!

We are pleased to announce that **Monica Mann-Wrobel** will be joining the MIRECC as a post-doctoral fellow in the summer of 2009. Monica is completing her PhD from the University of Maryland at College Park and is currently an intern in the VAMHCS/UMB Psychology Internship Consortium. She has been involved in both clinical and research training activities at the MIRECC since her first year of graduate school, including applying for and receiving an NRSA grant from NIMH to conduct her dissertation research in Dr. Sarah Morris' electrophysiology laboratory. We very much look forward to having her continue to work with the MIRECC.





SAVE THE DATE FOR RESEARCH DAYS!

The 13th annual VAMHCS Research Day is scheduled for Tuesday, May 5, 2009, from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Oral research presentations will take place in the VA auditorium. Vendors will be located in the 3rd floor atrium. For more information, contact Ann Kimball at ann.kimball@va.gov.

The UMB Department of Psychiatry Research Day will be held on Thursday, May 28, 2009, in the MSTF building auditorium and atrium. There will be a poster session, a series of brief oral research presentations by faculty across the various divisions in the Department, and a luncheon. For more information, contact Dr. Julie Kreyenbuhl at Julie.Kreyenbuhl@va.gov.

UPCOMING EVENTS

◆ Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar ◆

First Thursday of every month:

May 7, 2009

June 4, 2009

1:00 - 2:00 PM

MIRECC conference room, BVA (6A-168)

or PPVA VTel conference room, Bldg 364 (C-110)

or call 800-767-1750, code 79846

There has been increasing concern, both within and outside of the VA, about the metabolic side effects of second generation antipsychotic medications (SGAs). VAMHCS clinicians are encouraged to bring their difficult or complicated SGA cases to this seminar for consultation and advice. Anyone can present a case or just ask questions in this informal setting, so please join us as we learn from the consultants and from each other. The consultants are Robert Buchanan, MD, from the MIRECC Psychopharmacology Clinic and Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, and Julie Kreyenbuhl, PhD, PharmD from the MIRECC.

◆ 3rd Annual VA Mental Health conference ◆

Meeting the Diverse Mental Health Needs of Veterans: Implementing the Uniform Services Handbook

July 21- 23, 2009

Washington DC metro area

This meeting will allow for information sharing among mental health professionals and administrators on the current state of implementation of the Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook, the utilization of enhancement funding, and research-informed practices, as well as best practices identified by clinicians in the field.

◆ Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program ◆

Application Deadline: June 1, 2009

The VISN 5 MIRECC offers a small grant mechanism to fund recovery-oriented clinical and educational innovations in response to the VA's Action Agenda to transform VA mental health services to a recovery model. This program especially encourages (but is not limited to) proposals such as: creating, adopting, launching or expanding recovery-oriented clinical or self-help projects, new programs to educate staff, veterans, and/or family members of veterans about mental health recovery models, or specific recovery-oriented services/programs.

For more information or to receive an application, please contact Alicia Lucksted, PhD, MIRECC Recovery Coordinator, at Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov, 410-706-3244.

Visit our website at
<http://www.va.gov/VISN5mirecc>