

# THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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(VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center

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## MONTHLY CLINIC FOR VAMHCS CLINICIANS

*Submitted by Julie Kreyenbuhl, PhD, PharmD*

There has been increasing concern locally and nationally, and both within and outside of the VA, about the metabolic side effects of second generation antipsychotic medications (SGAs). In an effort to help clinicians manage complicated cases of patients who develop or are at risk to develop metabolic side effects while on SGAs, the VISN 5 MIRECC is sponsoring a monthly consultation seminar. The consultants are **Dr. Robert Buchanan**, from the MIRECC Psychopharmacology Clinic and Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, and **Dr. Julie Kreyenbuhl**, from the MIRECC.

VAMHCS clinicians are encouraged to bring difficult and complicated cases to the seminar for consultation and advice. All VA clinicians are invited to attend even if you don't have a case to present. Sessions are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month from 9-10 AM. The next session will take place on Wednesday, September 27, 2006 in the MIRECC conference room at the Baltimore VA (6A-168). It will be presented by Vtel to the Vtel conference room in building 364 at Perry Point. If attendance is difficult, the session can also be accessed by telephone by calling 800-767-1750, code 79846.

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## EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED COUPLES THERAPY WITH TRAUMA SURVIVORS

*Submitted by Neil Weissman, PsyD*

At the onset of her book by this title, Dr. Sue Johnson states, "We all know it is better not to be alone in the dark and that connection with others makes us stronger". Indeed, this concept lies at the heart of all our psychotherapy endeavors. Veterans who suffer psychological traumas which result in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) often feel profoundly alone and in the "dark" as they avoid and struggle with their painful memories and emotions. If part of a couple, both individuals may desperately need and yet fear a deep connection with their spouse. The goal of Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) is to make that relationship a safe haven which can promote and fortify the healing for each person.

The VA leads the field in the effective treatment of PTSD, and the VAMHCS offers comprehensive treatment options for veterans suffering from the disorder. However, one area that needs strengthening in our treatment options is our services for couples. EFT is an empirically supported treatment for distress in couples. It has a strong track record in the general population and appears well-suited to treat individuals with trauma. However, it has yet to be systematically attempted with individuals with military trauma, particularly combat trauma. With the support of the

MIRECC and VAMHCS trauma team, a pilot study will soon be initiated to assess the viability and effectiveness of EFT. In our preliminary work, clinicians have found EFT to be a promising treatment modality. Stay tuned for more information as the study begins to take shape.

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## COGNITIVE THERAPY AT MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY CONFERENCE

*Submitted by Neil Weissman, PsyD*

Recently in Philadelphia, nearly 200 VA employees from across the nation gathered to learn about the implementation of recovery strategies in the provision of care to veterans with serious mental illnesses (SMI). The three-day conference offered several key note lectures by leaders in the field, such as **Dr. Alan S. Bellack**, Director of the VISN 5 MIRECC. On the final day, **Dr. Neil Weissman** conducted two workshops on cognitive therapy for the treatment of veterans with SMI, which were attended by about eighty participants in total. A cognitive therapy model used in both individual and group treatment was described, then demonstrated by role playing with some audience members. The audience grasped that at the core of a recovery model is a cognitive and emotional affirmation of one's self, including a self appraisal of ability and potential. Therefore, they were keenly interested in the specifics of cognitive therapy, with many staying after the session for more information and to exchange contact information. Given the positive response of these workshop participants, it is possible that more VA treatment facilities will be utilizing cognitive therapy approaches and strategies in their work with veterans.

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## VETERANS LEND A HAND

*Submitted by Alicia Lucksted, PhD*

You may remember from our February, 2006, issue that Perry Point social worker Tracey

Stambaugh and other 364A staff obtained one of the MIRECC's Small Grant Program awards, designed to promote recovery-oriented education and/or clinical programs among staff and veterans. Their successful project, Veterans Service Day, is described below by Ms. Stambaugh in a letter to the editor of the Havre de Grace newspaper, The Record. This letter, which appeared in the May 24, 2006 issue, is reprinted with permission from The Record. If you are interested in applying to the MIRECC's Small Grant Program, please contact Dr. Alicia Lucksted at [Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov](mailto:Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov) or 410-706-3244.

To the Editor:

On May 4, a van pulled up to Jean Roberts Park in Havre de Grace and 10 veterans, with psychiatric illnesses, and staff from Perry Point VA Hospital got out. They were met by seven Havre de Grace High School students in the SMILES (Service Makes Individuals' Lives Extra-Special) Program and volunteers from the surrounding community. Together, they began pulling weeds, cleaning up trash and planting flowers around the stone sign that welcomes visitors to Havre de Grace. Metal furniture that had been illegally dumped in the brush under the train overpass was removed. Within two hours, the park was spotless! Purple petunias and red geraniums dotted the flower beds.

The event, called "Veterans' Service Day – 2006" was organized after several hospitalized veterans expressed the feeling that they were always on the receiving end of help and wanted a chance to give to others. Cleaning up Jean Roberts Park was a particularly appropriate gift to the town of Havre de Grace one day before the Decoy Festival.

Veterans with illnesses such as schizophrenia often live with other veterans in group homes in Cecil and Harford counties. Many go to Perry Point daily for work therapy and partial hospitalization programs. Much of their lives revolve around the VA. They have a hard time

making friends with people in the community who don't share their problems.

Mental illness can be very isolating. "Chronically normal" people can be equally unfamiliar with talking to individuals who are recovering from mental illness. There are barriers to overcome on both sides.

One of the goals of Veterans' Service Day 2006 was to provide education about chronic mental illnesses to the community volunteers. The SMILES volunteers attended a training session about schizophrenia in April. A veteran who has schizoaffective disorder and has been out of the hospital for two years talked with students about what it was like when he was ill, what his life is like now, and what he's had to do to maintain his recovery.

When the students met their veteran partners on May 4, they jumped right into conversations about school, the military, past jobs, past wars, hobbies, etc. Don Osman, who taught English at Havre de Grace High School for 30 years and who founded the SMILES Program, felt that the day was a big success. The veterans uniformly felt that the event had been fun and worthwhile.

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## WELCOME TO NEW MIRECC STAFF

**Jason Peer, PhD**, joins the MIRECC as a research fellow following the completion of his pre-doctoral internship at the VAMHCS/UM Psychology Internship Consortium. He recently received his doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, where his research focused on neurocognitive and social cognitive factors related to treatment response in serious mental illness (primarily schizophrenia spectrum disorders). Dr. Peer will be working on various research projects, including Dr. Wendy Tenhula's "The Use of Skills Training to Augment CWT/VI for Veterans with SMI" protocol.

**Amy Drapalski, PhD**, also joins the MIRECC as a research fellow after completing her pre-doctoral internship at the VAMHCS/UM Psychology Internship Consortium. Dr. Drapalski received her doctorate in clinical psychology from George Mason University. Her previous research focused on the emotional adjustment of jail inmates with mental illness during incarceration, and the impact of mental health treatment on inmates' psychological health. In the MIRECC, she will work on research related to services for persons with serious mental illness and their families.

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## GOOD-BYE AND THANKS

**Joanna Strong Kinnaman, PhD**, joined the MIRECC as a VA Post-Doctoral Fellow in Advanced Clinical Psychology in August 2004. Dr. Kinnaman has worked on various projects in the MIRECC related to treatment for dually-diagnosed patients with Drs. Alan Bellack and Melanie Bennett, as well as the development and examination of work-related psychosocial interventions for veterans with severe mental illness with Dr. Wendy Tenhula. Dr. Kinnaman will begin the next step in her career at the University of Vermont Department of Psychiatry and Vermont State Hospital where she will specialize in treatment and program development for patients with dual-disorders and primary substance use disorders. We appreciate her many contributions to the MIRECC and wish her the very best in her new venture.

After six years as a Research Assistant with the MIRECC, **Amanda Dutton, LCSW-C**, is leaving us for a social work position in the substance abuse clinic within the BVAMC Mental Health Service Line. Amanda has contributed significantly to MIRECC protocols through the years as a recruiter for several protocols and a group therapist for our dual diagnosis treatment studies. She also worked on a multi-site national study providing individual treatment for women with PTSD, administered diagnostic assessments, and even did a stint as the editor of the MIRECC Matters! We will

certainly miss her and wish her the best as she furthers her social work career.

We said good-bye in July to three post-doctoral fellows: **Drs. Kathleen Tallent, Matthew Specht, and Christina Watlington.** Dr. Tallent will be teaching at St. Mary's College. Dr. Specht is now a program coordinator in the Child

Psychiatry Department at Johns Hopkins University, and Dr. Watlington is working in the Returning Veterans Outreach, Education and Care Program at the Perry Point VAMC. We thank them for their efforts at the MIRECC and wish them all the best in their new endeavors.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **“Mental Illness: Pathways to Recovery” Family Conference**

November 4, 2006

8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Baltimore VAMC Auditorium

Veterans and their families/caregivers are invited to attend this half-day conference presented by the VISN 5 MIRECC. Alicia Lucksted, PhD, will present information about the recovery model and the impact of family/caregivers' involvement in the recovery process. Support services in both the VA and the community will be highlighted, and consumers who are involved with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) will present a workshop entitled “In Our Own Voices”. In addition, Bette Stewart will present information about the NAMI “Family to Family” Program.

For more information, please contact Cynthia Clark, RNC, at [Cynthia.clark2@med.va.gov](mailto:Cynthia.clark2@med.va.gov) or by phone at 410-605-7298.

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### **Maryland Schizophrenia Conference**

November 7, 2006

8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Martin's West

6817 Dogwood Road

Baltimore, MD

For more information, visit [www.mdschizconf.org](http://www.mdschizconf.org) or call the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center at 410-402-7666.

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### **Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program**

#### **Application Deadline**

September 1, 2006

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, or launching new recovery-oriented clinical, self-help, or related projects (or expanding existing ones to

reach more veterans), new programs to educate staff, veterans, and/or family members of veterans about mental health recovery models, or specific recovery-oriented services/programs. The first round of applications were received September 1, 2005, and reflected a diversity of VA programs and innovative ideas.

For more information, or to receive an application, please contact Alicia Lucksted, PhD, MIRECC Recovery Coordinator, at [Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov](mailto:Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov), 410-605-7451 or 410-706-3244.

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### **Schizophrenia And Other Mental Illnesses: Involving The Family, Improving Care**

This one hour, three-part (20 minutes each) DVD program highlights the importance of including families in the treatment of patients with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. This program is highly recommended for families, patients, clinicians, policy makers and the general public. For a copy, contact Fran Broomall at [fran.broomall@va.gov](mailto:fran.broomall@va.gov) or 410-605-7000, x 4740.

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