

THE VISN 5 MIRECC MATTERS

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

June 10, 2008 Volume 9, No. 3

Editor: Shannon Thomas-Lohrman, MS (shannon.thomas-lohrman@va.gov)

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SMOKING CESSATION IN SPMI

Submitted by Melanie Bennett, PhD

Over 70% of people with severe and persistent mental illnesses (SPMI) smoke cigarettes, a rate that is double to triple that of the general population. Smoking has a destructive impact on the already compromised physical health of people with SPMI, and has been identified as one of the single most important risk factors for medical disease and elevated mortality in this population. Attempts to reduce smoking among people with SPMI, most of which use smoking cessation interventions adapted from general population programs, have had limited success.

Drs. Melanie Bennett, Lisa Dixon, and Faith Dickerson received a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to develop, pilot test, and evaluate an innovative intervention for smoking cessation in people with SPMI attending community psychiatric rehabilitation programs (PRPs). The intervention, Behavioral Treatment for Smoking Cessation in Serious and Persistent Mental Illness (BTSCS), incorporates the best of stop smoking programs along with skills training to address problems that serve as triggers for smoking, so that participants learn to reduce/quit smoking and to live life as a non-smoker.

Participants will be current smokers with SPMI and at least a moderate level of nicotine dependence (at least 10 cigarettes smoked per day). PRP's are attractive sites for smoking cessation programs because the clients who attend them are psychiatrically stable, attendance is more frequent, and programming is focused on helping to improve clients' long-term health and overall recovery.

BTSCS includes: 1) A behaviorally-oriented group intervention that addresses stop smoking and coping skills training, education, and relapse prevention training; 2) contingency management procedures to reinforce attendance and reductions in smoking; 3) supported use of Bupropion or nicotine replacement therapy that is integrated with clients' other psychiatric care; and 4) smoking cessation care coordination aimed at increasing treatment engagement and attendance.

SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM SUPPORTS WRAP TRAINING

Submitted by Samuel B. Korobkin, PhD

Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) is a powerful and effective system for the self-management of psychiatric symptoms. Developed by Mary Ellen Copeland, PhD, WRAP is firmly founded in the five key concepts of recovery: hope, personal responsibility, education, self-advocacy, and support. Those engaged in a WRAP program discover what they can do for themselves to achieve and maintain wellness. WRAP services in the VAMHCS were initiated by Dr. Sam Korobkin, clinical psychologist for the Social Skills & Health Improvement Program (SSHIP). After attending a MIRECC-sponsored webinar presented by Dr. Copeland, Dr. Korobkin was inspired to apply to the MIRECC Small Grants Program and was awarded funding for two clinicians to receive certification in WRAP facilitation. Since completing that training in February, 2008, Dr. Korobkin and Suzanne Greer, LCSW/C, have presented two introductory in-service trainings on WRAP at the Baltimore and Perry Point VAMCs. A third day-long training is scheduled for November 3, 2008, at the Baltimore VA.

Dr. Korobkin has been providing WRAP psychoeducational groups on an outpatient (through the SSHIP program) and inpatient basis (units 364A and 364B in Perry Point and 6A in Baltimore). In addition, in May, 2008, he began the first 15-week WRAP group at the Baltimore VAMC. Plans to expand the use of WRAP within the new Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Centers (PRRC) are currently in development. For more information, please contact Dr. Korobkin at Samuel.Korobkin@va.gov, (410) 605-7000 x 5220 (Baltimore) or (410) 642-6411 x 6522 (Perry Point).

SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM SUPPORTS HOLISTIC HEALTH SYMPOSIUM

Submitted by Alicia Lucksted, PhD

On April 4, 2008, the DC VAMC Social Work Service sponsored a Body-Mind-Spirit Symposium for veterans enrolled in mental health services. Organized by the Social Work Service Resources Committee, headed by Kevin Morton, LICSW, and supported by the VISN 5 MIRECC Small Grants Program, the symposium offered workshops on various aspects of holistic health and resources available at the DC VAMC and surrounding community.

To open the program, Medical Center Director Fernando O. Rivera and Senior Assistant Chief of Social Work Linda Scognamiglio welcomed the approximately 50 veterans in attendance. Local Recovery Coordinator Liz Kosmopolous gave an introduction to the recovery approach to mental health, which framed the day. The principles of holistic health, empowerment, personal responsibility and individualized care carried throughout the rest of the program. Presentations and discussions about yoga, mindfulness relaxation, acupuncture and health and spirituality rounded out the morning, taking advantage of expertise among DC's mental health staff. After lunch in the medical center's cafeteria, veterans returned for presentations on nutrition, exercise, and the Health Improvement Program (HIP). Many asked questions about the practical aspects of being more physically active in the face of health problems, and eating a healthier diet.

Many veterans were also interested in using acupuncture to treat various symptoms and were pleased to learn that it is now available at the VA. "I'm glad I came and got this new information," said

one veteran. "I'm going to look into acupuncture more, as maybe another way to help my problems." Others asked for details about on-going yoga classes.

The veterans seemed pleased with the informative program. "I think we really got something out of it. It was a neat program, enjoyable, with lots of good information", said one attendee. Because the planning committee asked attendees to complete a quality of life and activities survey, they will be able to follow up with each veteran to see if attending the symposium led to their trying or adopting new health practices. The yoga and acupuncture staff have already reported increased inquiries and attendance at classes.

INAUGURAL WORKSHOP A SUCCESS!

Submitted by Matt Wiley

On April 21-22, 2008, the VISN 5 MIRECC hosted the inaugural workshop for the VA Social Skills Training (VA-SST) Program. The 2-day workshop, held at the Maritime Institute Hotel in Linthicum Heights, MD, was well regarded by the 30 trainees in attendance, who represented a wide variety of mental health professional disciplines from VISNs 3 - 6 and VISN 8. The keynote presentation was delivered by Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP, Director of the VA-SST Program. In it, he described the ongoing efforts of the VA to implement evidence-based practices, the value of a recovery-oriented model of care, and how social skills training serves as an effective tool for veterans living with serious mental illness.

In addition to plenary talks on recovery and the social skills model, the workshop exposed trainees to a hands-on learning approach. Working in small group formats, trainees learned the intricacies of conducting SST groups by facilitating and observing mock group sessions. The training staff was composed of several clinicians with experience in the delivery of SST in the VA setting: Alan S. Bellack, PhD, ABPP, Wendy N. Tenhula, PhD, Joanna Strong Kinnaman, PhD, Jean S. Gearon, PhD, Cindy Clark, RN, C, CD, Amy Drapalski, PhD, and Rebecca Pasillas, PhD.

After the workshop, trainees returned to their respective facilities to incorporate SST groups into routine care. To help them with the implementation process and to further develop their skills in leading

SST groups, each trainee was assigned an SST consultant. For six months, consultants will provide ongoing support and guidance through group teleconference consultation as well as individual feedback sessions.

A second workshop, hosted by the VISN 22 MIRECC, was held May 19-20 in Long Beach, CA and trained clinicians from VISNs 20 - 22. The next round of workshops in Baltimore and Long Beach will be later this year. If you have questions about the program, please contact Matt Wiley, VA-SST Program Coordinator, at Matthew.Wiley@va.gov or (410) 605-7457.

**RECORD ATTENDANCE AT
"LIVING HEALTHY, LIVING WELL"
FAMILY CONFERENCE**

Submitted by Cynthia Clark, RN, C, CD

On Saturday, May 10, 2008, a record 102 participants attended the 7th conference for veterans with mental illness and their families, presented by the VISN 5 MIRECC at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. The focus of this conference was co-occurring mental and medical illnesses and strategies for promoting health and wellness. Expert presenters included Lisa Dixon, MD, Richard Goldberg, PhD, and Donald Thomas, RNC, M Ac. In addition, a veteran consumer spoke about his personal journey dealing with concurrent mental and physical health issues. After lunch, participants gathered VA and community health and wellness-related literature, including information from the Baltimore City Department of Health and the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

We hope to plan a similar event at the Perry Point VA Medical Center for the fall of 2008, so watch this newsletter for details!

CONGRATS ARE IN ORDER!

MIRECC investigator Melanie Bennett, PhD, has been promoted to Clinical Associate Professor at the UMB School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry.

Sarah Morris, PhD, has been appointed the Director of Training for the VAMHCS/UMB School of Medicine Psychology Internship Consortium. This program provides a year of clinical and research training to pre-doctoral students based at various locations within the VAMHCS and UMMS. Areas of training include adult serious mental illness, community psychiatry, school-based mental health, child and adolescent psychiatry, neuropsychology, trauma recovery, substance use disorders, and health psychology. Dr. Morris has been involved in the internship as a research supervisor and as coordinator of the weekly didactics in recent years and assumed her new role as of June, 2008.

After completing her postdoctoral fellowship at the VISN 5 MIRECC, Amy Drapalski, PhD, joined the MIRECC to assist Dr. Alan S. Bellack, MIRECC Director and Chair of the National Recovery Advisory Committee, with efforts to implement the national recovery agenda. This includes increasing the use of consumer-centered, recovery-oriented services and evidence-based treatments for veterans with mental illness. Amy will also be continuing her work on research projects focused on consumer-oriented interventions for increasing family involvement in mental health care and strategies for addressing internalized stigma among veterans with serious mental illness.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar

First Thursday of every month:

July 3, 2008

August 7, 2008

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.

Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program
Application Deadline: September 1, 2008

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>