

BRIEFINGS

The latest news and updates from the Mid-Atlantic MIRECC

20 YEARS

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Director's Update



The [VISN 6 MIRECC](#) continues to celebrate 20 years of research, education and clinical service to our Veterans and their families. This newsletter edition will highlight some of the accomplishments and impacts of the VISN 6 MIRECC [Clinical Core](#).

The Clinical Core's mission is to facilitate the translation, implementation and dissemination of post-deployment mental health research through 1) consultation, 2) clinical trainings and 3) program evaluation. Over the past 20 years, the Clinical Core

has seamlessly integrated these approaches to improve post-deployment mental health.

*The earliest efforts of the Clinical Core produced a study of treatment preferences among Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Veterans that informed a cascade of Clinical Projects over the next 20 years. One of the most impactful was the co-development and co-leadership of the North Carolina Governors Working Group for Service Members, Veterans, And Their Families (NCGWG). As the NCGWG expanded, the Clinical Core identified a crucial lack of military culture and clinical competence and with funding from VA's ORH, developed a seminal report, *Serving Those Who Have Served: Educational Needs of Health Care Providers Working with Military Members, Veterans, and Their Families* (2011). Findings from this report led to *Painting a Moving Train*—a series of day-long live educational trainings provided by the military and MIRECC speakers, which were later translated into online versions posted on the Area Health Education Center's (AHEC) national virtual training system and resulted in the first grant awarded by the National AHEC system to support "train-the-trainer" programs across the nation. *Painting a Moving Train's* impact was broad and substantial, as it resulted in a 10% increase in the number of TRICARE providers in North Carolina, provided support for Reservists who may have lapses in care during the deployment cycle as they switch between civilian and military health insurance, and resulted in further adaptations for other audiences including providers on the insurance panel of North Carolina Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

*Through the Clinical Core's growing experience working with military families, the focus shifted to military children, which led to a number of new MIRECC activities including: publication of an invited article entitled "Building Communities of Care for Military Children and Families;" collaboration in research on family therapy with Shirley Glynn, Ph.D, Director of the VA Marriage and Family Counseling Team; and, under the direction of Steven Sayers, Ph.D of the VISN 4 MIRECC, the development and

Director's Update, Cont'd

management of VA's Coaching Into Care (CIC) program which offered confidential assistance for family members and friends of Veterans. In recent years, CIC has developed a Lethal Means Safety intervention for family members and friends of Veterans, which compliments the Worried About a Veteran website (worriedaboutaveteran.org) that was created by the Governor's Challenge group in New York state.

In 2013, the VA Under Secretary for Health mandated that each VA facility was to hold a community Mental Health Summit. Aware of our success in establishing an effective DoD/VA/State and Community partnership, the Office of Mental Health Services in VA Central Office called upon the VISN 6 MIRECC Clinical Core to design, organize, and evaluate this national program. The Clinical Core has continued to coordinate and report on this process to the present day. Through the Mental Health Summits, the Clinical Core has been able to build upon its deep experience to help define a national agenda for public health and clinical strategies across the nation in response to deployment stress and its mental health sequelae.

The Clinical Core continues to provide program evaluation support for several national programs, including the National Evidence Based Psychotherapy (EBP) Program. This partnership with the EBP Program resulted in an Advanced Safety Planning Program which improved provider competency in the intervention, yielding higher quality safety plans. Additional program evaluation projects to highlight include the development and validation of the Durham Risk Score, which enables clinicians to identify patients at high risk for attempting suicide in the future, as well as development and validation of a screen for nonsuicidal self-injury for use with Veterans.

The Clinical Core also continues to support the development and implementation of clinical trainings to improve care delivery. These include multiple clinical trainings that resulted in online Veteran trainings related to insomnia, parenting, a pain management training for both providers and Veterans, and ongoing training development for clinicians providing group therapy. In addition, the Clinical Core supports ongoing activities within the VISN that includes improvement processes for facility programming. Through the Building Veteran Healthy Communities project, the Clinical Core also works closely with the Durham VAHCS, VISN 6, and academic partners to build community capacity in North Carolina to support Veterans at high risk for mental health crises and suicide. Additionally, the Clinical Core provides consultation services to investigators, both within and outside of the VA who have interest in or provide clinical care to Veterans.

The Clinical Core Family Interest Group (FIG) was established early in MIRECC's development and has continued to comprise both clinicians and researchers across multiple facilities across the VISN and multiple academic partners. The FIG provides VISN 6 mental health guidance on new directives and policies related to family services. Over the years, the Clinical Core has mapped family services available at each VA facility and developed an informal case consultation program for members. The FIG seeks to expand consultation services in FY25.

To summarize, the Clinical Core is one of the three pillars that support the MIRECC mission to improve post-deployment mental health for our Veterans and their families. I'd like to thank both past and present Clinical Core leaders, staff and shareholders for their leadership and substantial contributions to the Core and the VISN 6 MIRECC. Since Day 1, the Clinical Core has been committed to informing and advancing clinical care, which effectively shaped the Clinical Core path for the next 20 years. I am excited to see where the Clinical Core leads us over the next 20 years.

*For a more detailed account of the Clinical Core's early accomplishments, please see [Dr. Kudler's article](#) on our website:



Jennifer C. Naylor, PhD

Director, Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC



FOCUS ON THE VISN



HONORS, GRANTS AND AWARDS



★ The VISN-6 MIRECC's Advanced Psychology Fellowship at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System has been granted its Accreditation Re-Affirmed!

On July 17-20, 2024, the [American Psychological Association's Commission on Accreditation \(CoA\)](#) reaffirmed accreditation of the VISN-6 MIRECC-affiliated Advanced Psychology Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment (MIRT) at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System. The academic review included the consideration of the program's 2022 self-study report, and the report of the team that visited the program on March 7-8, 2024. The decision was based on the CoA's professional judgement showing that the program has demonstrated adherence to the Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology (SoA). The next site visit will be held in 2034.

★ **Dr. James Bjork, PhD**, was promoted to Full Professor effective July 1, 2024, at the Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. Congratulations for this important scholarly achievement!

★ **Dr. James Bjork, PhD (PI)**, received a \$60,000 award from Cures Within Reach for the project entitled: "[Daily Rotigotine Patch to Enhance Behavioral Therapy for Cocaine Use Disorder Recovery in Veterans](#)", along with a supplement to improve recruitment outreach to marginalized Veterans.

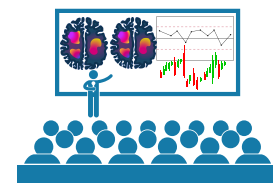
★ **Dr. Melissa Smigelsky, PhD (PI)**, received a research pilot award from the VISN 6 MIRECC for the amount of \$14,955 to conduct a study examining the clinical outcomes of a novel moral injury group intervention. The project is entitled "[Reclaiming Experiences and Loss \(REAL\): Evaluating a Mental Health/Chaplain Co-Led Moral Injury Group](#)."

★ **Dr. Sarah "Sadie" Wilson, PhD (PI)**, received a IIR 22-199-3 award, for the HSR funded trial entitled "[Equity-Focused Implementation of LGBTQ-Affirmative Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: A Hybrid Implementation-Effectiveness Trial](#)" that started on August 1, 2024 and will continue through 2028.



EDUCATION AND DISSEMINATION

Scientific Posters, Presentations, Webinars, Conferences and Other Activities



Martindale, S.L. (August, 2024). TBI, Blast, and Distress Tolerance. WRIISC team. (Virtual presentation)

Nieuwsma, J.A. & O'Dunne, K. (July, 2024). ACT, chaplaincy, and psychosocial-spiritual care. ACT Mini Lecture Series, Department of Veterans Affairs (Virtual presentation)

Nieuwsma, J.A., & Smigelsky, M.A. (July, 2024). Upstream Suicide Prevention via Faith Community Engagement. 2024 VA/DOD Suicide Prevention Conference, Portland, OR. (Presentation)

Nieuwsma, J.A., Smigelsky, M.A., Jackson, G.L., & Meador, K.G. (July, 2024). Upstream Suicide Prevention: Moral Injury Care. 2024 VA/DOD Suicide Prevention Conference, Portland, OR. (Presentation)

Nieuwsma, J.A., Kamphuis, J., Tota, N., & Wortmann, J. (July, 2024). How chaplains in DoD and VA are integrating evidence-based psychotherapeutic skills into spiritual care to prevent service member and veteran suicide. Symposium presented at the VA/DoD Suicide Prevention Conference, Portland, OR. (Presentation)

Nieuwsma, J.A., Smigelsky, M.A., Jackson, G.J., & Meador, K.G. (June, 2024). The Dynamic Diffusion Network: A Novel Model for Collaboratively Advancing Innovative, Interdisciplinary Chaplaincy Practices. Association for Professional Chaplains Annual Meeting, St. Louis, MO. (Workshop)

Nieuwsma, J.A., Williams, J.B., Geevarghese, S.K., & Perry, S. (April, 2024). Encountering moral injury as a health care professional. Ethics Grand Rounds, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN. (Presentation and discussion panel)

Schroeder, R. A., Erdodi, L. A., Shura, R. D., Soble, J. R., & Armistead-Jehle, P. (June, 2024). Expanding Your Validity Test Toolbox: Lesser Utilized PVTs and SVTs That Should Be Considered. 22nd Annual Conference of the American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology, Scottsdale, AZ. (Workshop)

EDUCATION AND DISSEMINATION, Cont'd

Shura, R. D. (May, 2024). Malingering of ADHD. Psychotropic Drug Safety Initiative (PDSI). (Presentation)

Smigelsky, M. (July, 2024). Attending to Moral Injury in Veterans: Considerations for Conceptualization and Care. Grand Rounds, Cheyenne VA Health Care System. (Virtual presentation)

Smigelsky, M.A. (June, 2024). Attending to Moral Injury in Veterans: Considerations for Conceptualization and Care. Trauma Recovery Program, VA Palo Alto Health Care System. (In-service training)

Smigelsky, M.A., Parker, R., Maynard, J., Check, C., & Dordal, P. (July, 2024). Increasing Chaplain Support for Veterans at Risk for Suicide. 2024 VA/DOD Suicide Prevention Conference, Portland, OR. (Presentation)

Smigelsky, M.A. (June, 2024). Knowing and Not Knowing: Embodying Cultural Humility. DEI journal club. Eastern Colorado VA Health Care System. (Virtual presentation)

Smigelsky, M. A. (May, 2024). Understanding moral injury in veterans: Considerations for conceptualization, assessment, and care. 27th Annual VA Psychology Leadership Conference, Washington, DC. (Presentation)

Smigelsky, M. & Check, C. (April, 2024). Let's Get "REAL" About Moral Injury. VA Geriatric Scholars Program. (Virtual webinar)

Wortmann, J.H., Booth, R., & Sanders, V. (June, 2024). Integrating Principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in Interdisciplinary Chaplain Education and Care. Association of Professional Chaplains Annual Conference, St. Louis, MO. (Workshop)



Scientific Articles:

Bjork, J.M., Sadicario, J.S., Jahan, N., Thuma, L., Curiel, E., Reisweber, J. (2024). Virtual Hybrid vs. In-person Administration of Transcending Self Therapy for Veterans with Substance Use Disorders. Substance Abuse: Research and Treatment 18: 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/29768357241255437>

Blyth, S. H., Polick, C., Kim, L., Eason, S., Rubenstein, D., Thompson, S., Drummond, T., Ward, H. B., & Young, J. (in press). Noninvasive Brain Stimulation for Opioid Use Disorder: An Update of the Literature. Current Behavioral Neuroscience Reports.

Brown, L.A., Swinkels, C., Barnes, C., May, A., Daniel, S., Hill, M., Crasta, D., Goodman, M. & Sayers, S. (2024). Coaching third parties for suicide prevention. The Behavior Therapist, 47(5), 247-255. <https://mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?m=71213&i=825946&p=2&ver=html5>

Bottomley, J. S., Smigelsky, M. A., Campbell, K. W., Neimeyer, R. A., & Rheingold, A. A. (2024). Bereavement-related needs and their relation to mental health symptoms among adults bereaved by suicide and fatal overdose. Journal of Loss and Trauma. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2024.2357776>

Fleming, W. H., & Smigelsky, M.A. (2024). Enhancing the utility of the moral injury experience wheel: Manualized applications for diverse contexts. Journal of Religion and Health. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-024-02082-9>

Gilman, J.M., Kaur, J., Tervo-Clemmens, B., Potter, K., Sanzo, B.T., Schuster, R.M., Bjork, J.M., Evins, E.A., Roffman, J.L., Lee, P. (2024). Associations Between Behavioral and Self-Reported Impulsivity, Brain Structure, and Genetic Influences in Middle Childhood. Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience 67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcn.2024.101389>

López-Ojeda, W. & Hurley, R.A. (in press). The Vagus Nerve and the Brain-Gut Axis: Implications for Neuropsychiatric Disorders. J Neuropsychiatry Clin Neurosc.

López-Ojeda, W. & Hurley, R.A. (2024). Cold-Water Immersion: Neurohormesis and Possible Implications for Clinical Neurosciences. J Neuropsychiatry Clin Neurosc. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.neuropsych.20240053>

Ma., L., Braun, S.F., Steinberg, J.L., Bjork, J.M., Martin, C., Keen, L.D., Moeller, F.G. (2024). Effect of Scanning Duration and Sample Size on Reliability in Resting State fMRI Dynamic Causal Modeling Analysis. NeuroImage 292. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2024.120604>

Plonski, P.E., Vassileva, J., Shahidi, R., Perrin, P., Carter, W., Goetz, L., Brochetti, A., Bjork, J.M. (2024). Decision-making and Self-care in People Managing Traumatic Spinal Cord Injury: A Preliminary Study. Journal of Behavioral and Brain Science 14 (2). <https://doi.org/10.4236/jbbs.2024.142005>

Sawyers, C., Straub, L.K., Gauntlett, J., Bjork, J.M. (2024). Developmental differences in striatal recruitment by reward prospects as a function of attentional demand. Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience 68: 101412. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcn.2024.101412>

Smigelsky, M.A., Maynard, J.L., Ford, C.G., Parker, R., Wortmann, J.H., Meador, K.G., Fink, A., & Nieuwsma, J.A. (2024). Increasing chaplain support for veterans at high risk for suicide through targeted outreach: A quality improvement initiative. Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy, Jan-Mar 30 (1) 33-45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2022.2136466>

White, A.M., Eglovitch M., Parlier-Ahmad, A.B., Dzierzewski, J.M., James, M., Bjork, J.M., Moeller, F.G., Martin, C.E. (2024). Insomnia Symptoms and Neurofunctional Correlates Among Adults Receiving Buprenorphine for Opioid Use Disorder. PLoS One, Jun 13;19(6): 2024, e collection. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0304461>



RESOURCES FOR VETERANS & FAMILIES

Visit [Self-help resources](#) to obtain education and support information for Veterans, friends and family members who may be facing mental health challenges. VA specialists have assembled a short list of reviewer's recommended materials that may be helpful in finding the most appropriate information for you.

Please click on each resource topic for more information.

- [General Mental Health](#)
- [Depression & Anxiety](#)
- [PTSD](#)
- [Substance Use Disorder \(SUD\)](#)



For additional help, access "[Learn About Resources and Support.](#)"



There are several free and anonymous on-line education and life coaching programs that use interactive exercises and video demonstrations to teach skills for overcoming life challenges. For more information, click [here](#).

- [Moving Forward](#)
- [Veteran Parenting](#)
- [Anger Management](#)
- [Path to Better Sleep](#)

NC DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

The DMVA Resource Guide is produced and published by the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to assist and educate Veterans in learning about state and federal veteran benefits.

To view/download the newest guide sections click [here](#).



UPCOMING WEBINARS FOR

NATIONAL CBOC MENTAL HEALTH GRAND ROUNDS (GRs) and OTHER PRESENTATIONS

Check the website for previous and upcoming webinars in this series available for credit in TMS.

For direct registration links, click [here](#).



For previous GRs recordings click [here](#).

MIRECC PRESENTS WEBINARS

(Join sessions via the Adobe Connect app):

Register through VA TMS EEA then attend LIVE at

<http://va-eecc-ees.adobeconnect.com/mireccpresents/>



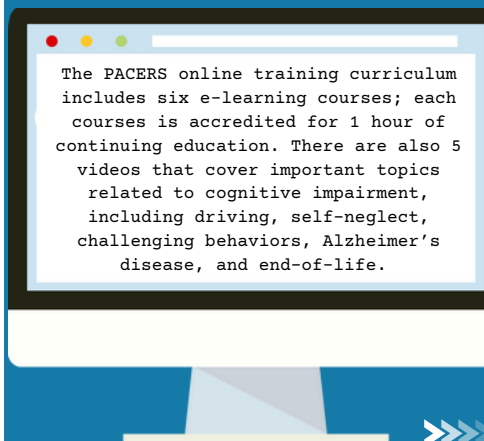
1st and 3rd Wednesdays
from October to June, 12 to 1pm (PT)

Access the MIRECC Presents webinar series calendar for upcoming events online at <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/vsn20/Education/webinars-mirecc-presents.asp>

PROVIDER EDUCATION



PACERS is an education program for health care staff who care for Veterans with cognitive disorders and their caregivers. While this program targets rural health care staff, providers working in any setting can benefit from this information.



The PACERS online training curriculum includes six e-learning courses; each course is accredited for 1 hour of continuing education. There are also 5 videos that cover important topics related to cognitive impairment, including driving, self-neglect, challenging behaviors, Alzheimer's disease, and end-of-life.

VA Providers: Take courses using TMS links

Non-VA Providers: Use TRAIN links

Course 1: Driving and Dementia-Hanging up the Keys.

Course 2: How to Deliver the Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease.

Course 3: How to Have an End of Life Discussion.

Course 4: How to Identify Self-Neglect.

Course 5: Addressing Decision-Making and Safety in Dementia.

VISIT PACERS for links to each course.



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