

# MIRECC Messenger

*VISN 4 Stars & Stripes Network*



## Stars & Stripes Network Launches MIRECC

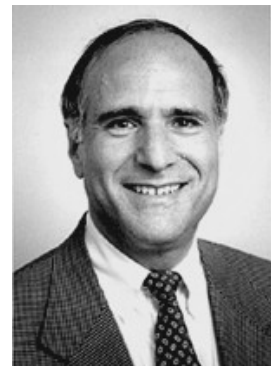
### *Letter from the Director*

We are pleased to announce the initiation of VISN 4's Mental Illness Research Educational and Clinical Center (MIRECC), a joint venture between the Philadelphia VA Medical Center (PVAMC) and the Highland Drive Division of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. The purpose of this MIRECC is to fundamentally improve the processes and outcomes of health care for veterans suffering from mental illness, with a focus on the theme of comorbidity of mental illness with substance abuse and general medical illnesses.

We selected this theme because, historically, inadequate attention to comorbidity has led much of our scientific research to fall short in its attempts to develop interventions that have a substantial impact on real patients and real communities. A large number of patients who present for treatment of general medical conditions, mental illnesses, or substance abuse disorders also suffer from one or more of the other types of illness. This presents clinicians with a more complicated picture than is typically represented in research studies.

To provide guidance to clinicians faced with these complex, real-world cases, our MIRECC will sponsor:

- basic, clinical, and services research that will advance knowledge of mental disorders that co-occur with substance abuse and medical illness;
- educational programs for scientists, clinicians, VA patients, their families, and the public at large;
- clinical programs designed to improve mental health and substance abuse care and its integration with other components of general medical and psychiatric care.



Ira Katz, M.D., PH.D.,  
MIRECC Director

### Points of Interest:

- The VISN 4 MIRECC will focus on comorbidity of psychiatric, physical, and substance use disorders
- Watch for announcements of future conferences, video/cd-rom releases, and other educational offerings
- Meet E. Cabrina Campbell, M.D.
- Learn how to get involved in the MIRECC

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## Upcoming Events

Our fall conference on "Suicide Risk Identification and Prevention in Primary Care and Behavioral Healthcare Settings" was a smashing success in both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. We will be offering smaller-scale educational efforts to follow up on the suicide prevention theme, the specific foci of which will be determined based upon input from fall conference participants. Our tentative plan is to begin with

three workshops, one each for behavioral health, primary care, and geriatrics, with a target date of mid-February. Specific topics will be announced in the next *Messenger*.

In mid to late winter, the MIRECC will co-sponsor a one-day teleconference on movement disorders. Stay tuned for further details.



*“The CRE teams exemplify our commitment to fostering a dialogue among researchers, educators, and clinicians”*

## MIRECC Structure

The VISN 4 MIRECC is organized into three Clinical, Research, and Education (CRE) teams that coordinate the activities of investigators, educators, and clinicians. CRE team members provide clinical consultation and education and participate in the formulation of research, the implementation of studies, the interpretation and dissemination of findings, and the translation of findings into advances in clinical care.

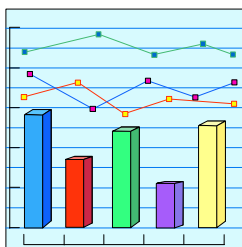
One CRE team is concerned with issues related to the rec-

ognition and treatment of substance abuse problems in medical and mental health care settings. A sample research project under this team is a study of olanzapine versus haloperidol in the treatment of patients with schizophrenia who abuse cocaine.

The second CRE team focuses on the general medical care of patients with serious mental illness (SMI). One study relevant to this theme is examining the prevalence of undetected diabetes among patients with SMI.

The third team focuses on the delivery of mental health services within primary and specialty medical care settings. An example of this research approach is a study of telephone disease management of depression and high-risk drinking in primary care.

The CRE teams exemplify our commitment to fostering a dialogue among researchers, educators, and clinicians so that each inform and are informed by the others.



## Current Research Activities

A wide range of research activities are underway as part of the MIRECC, including studies of:

- ⇒ Mu-opiate polymorphisms in alcoholics
- ⇒ PET study on Dopamine activity during cocaine craving
- ⇒ Treatment of schizophrenia with comorbid cocaine abuse
- ⇒ Cognitive changes during detoxification
- ⇒ Disease management by telephone of depression and high-risk drinking in primary care
- ⇒ Diabetes in patients with co-occurring serious mental illness
- ⇒ Specificity of antidepressant prescribing in primary care
- ⇒ Utility of Valproate vs. combined Valproate & Naltrexone in treating comorbid bipolar disorder and alcoholism
- ⇒ Use of Interferon/Ribavirin with methadone-maintained opiate dependent patients
- ⇒ Neuroimaging of serotonin receptor binding in depressed subjects with type 2 diabetes

## Current Educational Activities

In late September, we were pleased to present a conference on “Suicide Risk Identification and Prevention in Primary Care and Behavioral Healthcare Settings” in both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. A video and cd-rom will be created from footage from this conference, to be made available VISN-wide. In the future, this video will be accessible via our website, pro-

viding an opportunity for viewers to obtain CE credits (please visit [www.mirecc.org](http://www.mirecc.org) and follow the links to the VISN 4 website). Our MIRECC also was a video site for a teleconference on “Issues in Geropsychiatry: Psychosis and Agitation.”

We currently are completing VISN-wide needs assessments in behavioral health

and primary care, to be followed shortly by needs assessments with long term care staff and with patients and families. In response to the needs identified in this manner, we will develop conferences, seminars, videos, cd-roms, and treatment manuals to guide clinicians and patients in VISN 4 and the rest of the nation.



Dr. Gregory K. Brown presents at our fall conference on “Suicide Risk Identification and Prevention”



## Current Clinical Activities

MIRECC clinical program staff have been busy conducting a VISN-wide assessment of practitioners' needs for clinical programming relevant to comorbidity. Through focus groups and one-to-one interviews, the clinical group aims to identify areas in which they can help practitioners to improve their care of patients with comorbid illnesses. Some suggestions to date include the development of smoking cessation and pain management interventions, and models for improving

communication between primary care and behavioral healthcare providers.

This group also has undertaken an effort to characterize the nature of VA services by comparing VA and community methadone programs, estimating rates and predictors of suicide, and assessing adherence to clinical practice guidelines. From a review of these practice guidelines, MIRECC staff will develop best practice models to enhance the treatment of patients with comorbid illnesses.

The MIRECC offers clinical consultation and training through a telepsychiatry consultation service and through regular participation in a Psychiatric-Medical Case Conference. Our staff are developing web-based CME programs, to be available in the near future.

Finally, this group is involved in a number of clinical demonstration projects, including demonstrations in nursing home care, dementia assessment, and (pending funding) Parkinson's Disease.

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*"The clinical group aims to identify areas in which they can help practitioners to improve their care of patients with comorbid illnesses."*

## Spotlight on a MIRECC Investigator: E. Cabrina Campbell, M.D.

Dr. Campbell is a member of the MIRECC CRE Team on Addictions. A product of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, she completed her residency at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania and then became an Assistant Professor in Psychiatry at the Philadelphia VAMC and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. In addition to her research activities, at the PVAMC Dr. Campbell is the Attending Psychiatrist on an inpatient psychiatric unit and the Associate Chief of Inpatient Psychiatry, as well as the Director of the Medical Student Clerkship in Psychiatry.

Dr. Campbell boasts a record of leadership and intensive involvement with students. Her teaching skill has been recognized by the University of Pennsylvania through its Blockley-Osler Award, Penn Pearls Award for Clinical

Teaching of Medical Students, and Lindback Teaching Award. She offers the MIRECC extensive experience in educating medical students and psychiatry residents, and helps to coordinate these activities with the MIRECC Education Core.

Seminal discussions with Dr. Charles O'Brien at the PVAMC led Dr. Campbell to question why patients with schizophrenia who already were experiencing psychotic symptoms would potentially exacerbate those symptoms by using cocaine. Dr. Campbell was afforded the opportunity to explore this issue when she was awarded funding through both the VISN 4 Competitive Pilot Project Fund and the MIRECC to study the effects of typical versus atypical neuroleptics in patients with schizophrenia who abuse cocaine ("Olanzapine vs Haloperidol in Schizophrenia with Cocaine Abuse"). She is examining

the impact of these medications on cocaine craving and use as well as on side effects and psychotic symptomatology. The project has been underway at the PVAMC for several months and soon will be operational at the Pittsburgh and Coatesville VAMCs. A separate, multi-site VA Cooperative study with which Dr. Campbell and her mentor, Stanley Caroff, M.D. are affiliated will extend our understanding of the comparative value of these medications by examining their economic impact as determined by rates of re-hospitalization.

When not engaged in clinical work, education, or research, Dr. Campbell enjoys spending time with her beautiful 17-month old daughter, whose birth coincided with our submission of the MIRECC proposal. An auspicious beginning on both accounts!



Dr. E. Cabrina Campbell

## *VISN 4 Stars & Stripes Network*

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### **Focus on Comorbidity**

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WE'RE ON THE WEB!  
[WWW.MIRECC.ORG](http://WWW.MIRECC.ORG)

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## **The MIRECC as a Resource**

For all it offers, the VISN 4 MIRECC will be of little value if researchers, educators, and clinicians throughout the VISN don't know how to use it. Our next issue of the *Messenger* will provide an in-depth description of the ways in which a person might become involved with the MIRECC. In the meantime, we present an overview:

- Respond to the MIRECC needs assessments regarding your educational interests so your concerns will be reflected in future MIRECC programming.
- Join a CRE team and participate in discussions of research, educational, and clinical issues.
- Submit a proposal for a small research or clinical/educational demonstration project. The MIRECC will be issuing annual requests for proposals for funds to conduct small research projects. We also hope to make available funds on an annual basis for conducting clinical or educational demonstration projects. MIRECC staff will be available for consultation in developing proposals for both types of projects. Watch for these announcements in forthcoming editions of the *Messenger*.
- Share your knowledge and gain recognition for your expertise by participating in an inservice or workshop or by presenting at a MIRECC-sponsored conference.
- Attend MIRECC-sponsored educational events and obtain Continuing Education credits.

**MIRECC**  
Mental Illness Research, Education  
and Clinical Centers