

South Central MIRECC Communiqué

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“Closing the efficacy-effectiveness gap”

Studying the Effects of War on Emotional and Brain Functioning

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The recent attack on a dining hall at a U.S. military base in Iraq makes the dangers and hardships of war-zone participation more vivid to us all. Yet, military troops serving in war-zones are exposed on a regular basis to danger, harsh and hazardous physical environments, human tragedy, and separation from friends and families. Not surprisingly, military operational deployments have led to adverse mental and somatic health consequences among sizable subsets of deployed troops. However, there are many questions about how war-zone exposure affects mental and physical health, including which personal and war-zone-related factors put one at lesser or greater risk for the development of these problems.

Interpretation of findings from existing research examining the health consequences of war has been limited by several factors, such as the absence of critical pre-deployment data to answer questions regarding pre-existing conditions and risk factors, prolonged intervals between war-zone exposure and the collection of health data, and an over-reliance on subjective measures of health. The Neurocognition Deployment Health Study (NDHS) is an ongoing research collaboration between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs that attempts to address some of the gaps in the deployment health literature. The study focuses specifically on neuropsychological (as a non-invasive measure of brain functioning) and emotional outcomes of Operation Iraqi Freedom. We selected neural and emotional health outcomes as a focus because of their relevance to occupational and social functioning and their potential vulnerability to neurotoxicant and psychological stress exposures.

The NDHS is the first study of its type to assess participants both before and after they go to war. It was also designed with an eye towards combining self-reported and performance-based neuropsychological outcome measures. More specifically, the NDHS uses a controlled prospective cohort design and includes administration of objective, performance-based neuropsychological measures and self-report measures of emotional functioning. The study compares soldiers deploying to Iraq to soldiers who did not deploy to Iraq during the study period. Outcomes will be examined not only in light of whether or not soldiers deployed to Iraq but also in the context of key pre-deployment (e.g., baseline health, military training and experience, lifetime stress exposure) and deployment factors (e.g., war-zone stress exposure, unit characteristics, military occupational specialties, and objective environmental measures such as air, soil, and water quality collected by the US Army environmental specialists) that might be expected to influence outcomes.

The study, conducted on site at military installations, is currently just beyond its mid-point. With just under 1600 soldiers enrolled, all have completed a Time 1 assessment, and Time 2 assessments are in progress. We hope that information from the study will ultimately help enhance health and mental health functioning of military personnel and military veterans by identifying risk and protective factors that can later be integrated into development of appropriate prevention and treatment strategies.

The NDHS is led by PI, Dr. Jennifer Vasterling, South Central MIRECC Associate Director for Research and Co-PI, Dr. Susan Proctor of the Boston VA HSC. Co-Investigators include Dr. (Colonel) Paul Amoroso of the US Army Institute for Environmental Medicine (USARIEM) and Dr. Robert Kane of the Baltimore VA HSC. Funding sources include US Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, VA Medical Research Service, and VA South Central MIRECC. The study has been greatly facilitated by assistance from US Army Forces Command, DoD Deployment Health Support Directorate, National Center for PTSD, US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, USARIEM, Boston Environmental Hazards Center, US Army Medical Command/COSC, the medical leadership of the participating military unit, and a dedicated and skilled team of volunteer examiners.



CLINICAL EDUCATION GRANTS FOR 2005

The South Central MIRECC announces the Clinical Education Grants for 2005, which provides frontline clinicians with small grants to develop innovative education materials or treatment delivery strategies with mental health populations and providers. For this round of funding a panel of clinicians and educators reviewed fourteen grant applications and requested revisions from ten. From the revised submissions a total of six were funded. Two projects were funded in New Orleans, two in Oklahoma City, one in Houston, and one collaborative project between Dallas (VISN 17) and Little Rock. Congratulations to this year's recipients!

Monica Beer, Ph.D., Karin Thompson, Ph.D., Laurel Franklin, Ph.D., and Madeline Uddo, Ph.D. (New Orleans): *Development of an Informational DVD for Recently Deployed Veterans.* DVD intended for viewing in clinic waiting areas to inform recently deployed veterans about potential adjustment difficulties and direct them to services.

Stephen Gillaspy, Ph.D., John Tassej, Ph.D., and Pamela Fischer, Ph.D. (Oklahoma): *Development and Assessment of a Pre-Antiviral Depression Prevention and Management Program for Hepatitis C Patients.* A four-session pre-treatment curriculum to prevent or manage depression associated with Hepatitis C treatment.

James LePage, Ph.D., Pamela Abrams, MSW, and Marva Bluit, VRS. (Dallas & Little Rock): *Development of Vocational Rehabilitation Materials for Homeless Veterans with Mental Illness, Substance Dependence, or Legal Convictions.* Revise and evaluate a current vocational workbook and instructor's guide for use in Domiciliaries, Compensated Work Therapy, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Gina Manguno-Mire, Ph.D., Laurel Franklin, Ph.D., Fred Sautter, Ph.D., Karin Thompson, Ph.D., and Madeline Uddo, Ph.D. (New Orleans): *Psychoeducation for Traumatic Stress in Recently Deployed Veterans and Their Intimate Partners.* A 4-session program for veterans and their partners about the effects of traumatic stress on the individual and the relationship, emphasizing coping and prevention.

Kristen Sorocco, Ph.D., Tom Teasdale, Dr. PH, and Michelle Sherman, Ph.D. (Oklahoma): *MAPS: Directions for Family Members.* Information packet and support resources for family members and caregivers of veterans with a mental illness.

Wright Williams, Ph.D. (Houston): *Resilience to Trauma: What a Group of Former POWs Have to Teach Other Veterans about Survival with Trauma.* A series of testimonials by ex-POWs to illustrate effective coping with trauma and to inspire hope.

Thank you to the members of the review committee who dedicated their time and expertise to make the program a success. Members include Sue Bailey, Ph.D., Randy Burke, Ph.D., Nancy Faulk, R.N., Ph.D., Kathy Henderson, M.D., Michael R. Kauth, Ph.D., Snigdha Mukherjee, Ph.D., Jefferson Parker, Ph.D., Michelle Sherman, Ph.D., Thomas Teasdale, Dr.PH., and Karin Thompson, Ph.D. Special thanks to Greer Sullivan, M.D., MSPH, for her commitment to the program and to Debbie Hadsel, Brenda Schubert, and Melonie Lymuel-Hartley for their administrative support.

For additional information regarding the Clinical Education Grants program contact Dr. Randy Burke at (601) 362-4471, extension 1152 or Randy.Burke@med.va.gov. For a list of available education products please visit the South Central MIRECC website (www.va.gov/scmirecc). To request a product, send an email to Allen.Thomas3@med.va.gov.



Upcoming Educational Events

The MIRECC *Bring Science to Practice* web-based series presents **Kevin DelBen, Ph.D., on “PTSD: Lessons learned for other populations,” January 20, noon to 1:00 PM CT.** Dr. DelBen completed his internship at the Medical College of Georgia and received his doctorate from West Virginia University. His interests are broadly in the area of PTSD, specifically factors that mediate the relation between a traumatic event and the development of psychological symptoms.

Dr. DelBen’s PowerPoint presentation can be downloaded at <http://vawww.visn16.med.va.gov/mirecc.htm> beginning January 20 from a VA-networked computer. The live audioconference can be accessed at **1-800-767-1750, access code 45566#**. This presentation is not accredited. For additional information about this program, contact Tonya.welch@med.va.gov.

Call for Pilot Research Letters of Intent

Letters of Intent (LOI’s) are now being accepted for the South Central (VISN 16) MIRECC Pilot Study Research Program. The purpose of the program is to assist and encourage its Core and Affiliate Investigators and Fellows to develop research initiatives that can successfully compete for VA and non-VA peer reviewed funding. Pilot Studies are funded up to \$20,000.

South Central MIRECC Pilot Study Research Letters of Intent should be sent to Melonie Shelton, via fax 501-257-1718, or via email: sheltonmelonies@uams.edu. Questions may be directed to Melonie at 501-257-1971 or to Dr. Jennifer Vasterling, South Central MIRECC Associate Research Director via email: jennifer.vasterling@med.va.gov. **Letters of Intent for this cycle are due January 24, 2005.**



Measurement Resources

The **Measurement Excellence and Training Resource Information Center (METRIC)** is a Resource Center within the VA Health Services Research & Development Service (HSR&D). METRIC has been charged with improving the overall measurement quality in VA research. This site is a wonderful resource for researchers and clinicians who are looking for reliable measurement tools. For more information go to: <http://www.measurementexperts.org>

Research Fellowship Available with the MIRECC

The South Central Mental Illness Research, Education, & Clinical Center (MIRECC) and the Department of Veterans Affairs offers a two-year post-residency specialized training program in advanced psychiatry. This program accepts applications for one position each year at the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Houston, TX. Application deadline is February 1, but applications are reviewed as received and an applicant may be selected prior to this date.

This program aims to train psychiatrists to become outstanding clinical researchers in high priority areas of mental health, combining individualized mentored research and clinical training with a state-of-the-art curriculum that emphasizes research methods, statistics, epidemiology, mental health systems, quality improvement methods, education, and service delivery. Opportunities exist for research fellowships with focuses in neuroimaging, mental health services research, geropsychiatry, and psychopharmacology. Fellows devote 75% time to research and educational activities and 25% to clinical training in collaboration with their mentors.

Applicants must have completed ACGME accredited residency training, be board eligible / certified, and have an active unrestricted U.S. license to practice. International medical graduates must have a current VISA and an ECFMG certificate that is valid indefinitely. Applicants on a J-1 VISA must also have current ECFMG sponsorship. Stipends for trainees will be based on previously completed ACGME accredited residency training. All fellows will receive a \$5,000 start-up fund to support a research project and additional travel funds to present findings at a scientific conference.

Please contact **Mark E. Kunik, MD, MPH** at 713-794-8639 or email mkunik@bcm.tmc.edu if you would like further information or if you would like to discuss applying for this fellowship. We appreciate your interest!



Tools for Tobacco Cessation from EES

The Employee Education System (EES) in collaboration with the Offices of Quality and Performance (OQP) and Patient Care Services, Pharmacy Benefits Management-Medical Advisory Panel (PBM-MAP), and the Department of Defense (DoD) is pleased to provide key point cards, pocket guides and summaries of guideline modules for the management of tobacco use. These provider materials were developed to assist VA clinicians in all healthcare settings who are implementing the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) for Management of Tobacco Use. The materials provide a quick reference to important information needed to help patients stop using tobacco. The tools are small and portable. A full description of the tools is available at the web links below:

Key point card: http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=18925

Pocket guide: http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=18927

Summary of the guideline: http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=18925

To receive hard copies of the key point cards and pocket guide, ask your facility education contact to order the products you need. To find out who your facility education contact is, click on the link below:

<http://vaww.ees.lrn.va.gov/apps/contacts/contactlist.asp>

Announcements

Publications, presentations and new grants since May 2004 will be printed in the February 2005 issue. MIRECC Affiliates and staff, please send these items to Michael.kauth@med.va.gov

Understanding and Treating PTSD in Women Conference (VISN 5 MIRECC) will be held Monday, May 16, 2005 in Baltimore, MD. This conference will focus on the causes and treatment of PTSD in women. For more information contact Kim Gordley at CHEP, 1-800-949-1003 ext. 1857 or kim.gordley@med.va.gov.

January Conference Calls 1-800-767-1750

- 3 - Education Core, 2:00 PM CT, access code 16821# - *Cancelled*
- 3 - Schizophrenia Team, 3:00 PM CT, access code 20061#
- 11 - Directors Call, 3:00 PM CT, access code 19356#
- 12 - Neuroimaging Group, 9:00 AM CT, access code 24394
- 18 - Substance Abuse Team, General, 1:00 PM CT, access code 23400#
- 19 - Program Assistants, 2:00 PM CT, access code 43593#
- 24 - Disorder Team Leaders, 2:00 PM CT, access code 20143#
- 24 - PRECEP Call, 11:00 AM CT, access code 39004#
- 25 - Directors Call, 3:00 PM CT, access code 19356#

The next issue of the *South Central MIRECC Communiqué* will be published February 7, 2005. Deadline for submission of items to the February newsletter is January 31. Urgent items may be submitted for publication in the *Communiqué Newsflash* at any time. Email items to the Editor, Michael R. Kauth, Ph.D., at Michael.Kauth@med.va.gov or FAX to (504) 585-2954.

South Central MIRECC Internet site: www.va.gov/scmirecc/

SC MIRECC intranet site: vaww.visn16.med.va.gov/mirecc.htm

National MIRECC Internet site: www.mirecc.med.va.gov