

Mental Healthcare Report

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Center for Mental
Healthcare and
Outcomes Research

A VA HSR&D
Center of Excellence

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John Heckler and Dani Cothorn,
VA HSR&D staff, work on
the CeMHOR web page.

(Story on page 3)



Grant received to study stakeholder perspectives on sustaining involvement in schizophrenia care

Schizophrenia, as a chronic mental illness, has a devastating effect on every aspect of a person's life, as well as the lives of family members and friends.

After an inpatient stay, some people with schizophrenia decide to seek continued care as an outpatient. Others do not, going without treatment. And some of those who get outpatient care may cycle in and out of treatment for months or years.

What factors influence or motivate people with schizophrenia to seek treatment and stay in long-term care? What is it that family members, close friends and even community providers do to facilitate long-term involvement in care?

Those questions and others will be addressed as part of a recently funded VA grant project with Ellen Fischer, PhD, CeMHOR Health Scientist, as Principal Investigator. The 32-month study is titled "Stakeholder Perspectives on Sustaining Involvement in Schizophrenia Care."

Dr. Fischer will be assisted by Jean McSweeney, PhD, RN, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, and Jeffrey Pyne, MD, CeMHOR Research Career Development Award recipient.

"We know that a high proportion of people diagnosed with schizophrenia are not routinely in care," Dr. Fischer explained. "This is true with

most chronic disorders, not just schizophrenia. People may go into the hospital and, when discharged, be in outpatient care for a time, but then drop out. Or they may not get any treatment in the community after hospitalization.

"We also know that effective treatment for schizophrenia is available, but effectiveness depends on people getting into and staying in treatment," Dr. Fischer said.

A large body of literature exists on medication adherence and a smaller body on what motivates people to stay connected to care over time. Resource-intensive programs such as assertive community treatment, and coercive measures such as outpatient commitment, increase regular involvement in care, Dr. Fischer said.

"However, the field has not been particularly successful in sustaining involvement in care using

(continued on page 2)

Treatment retention is topic of grant project site collaboration

THE EXTENT TO WHICH A SHIFT FROM INPATIENT TO outpatient treatment has affected the care of veterans diagnosed with psychotic disorders is the topic of a three-year VA study on which CeMHOR investigators are collaborating.

Frederic C. Blow, PhD, is Principal Investigator for "Determinants of Treatment Retention for Veterans with Psychoses." He is Director of the Serious Mental Illness Treatment Research and Evaluation Center (SMITREC) in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

(continued on page 2)

Grant Title: "Stakeholder Perspectives on Sustaining Involvement in Schizophrenia Care"

Principal Investigator: Ellen Fischer, PhD

Co-investigators: Jean McSweeney, PhD, RN (UAMS), and Jeffrey Pyne, MD

Consultants: D. Keith Williams, PhD (UAMS); Frederic C. Blow, PhD (HSR&D Center of Excellence, Ann Arbor, MI); and Richard R. Owen, MD

Start Date: October 1, 2001

Total Funding: \$455,247

CeMHOR's Fischer receives grant *(continued from front page)*

non-coercive, average-intensity strategies. With this study, we hope to expand our understanding of what motivates, facilitates and impedes people with schizophrenia seeking and continuing in treatment."

Dr. Fischer and her research team will look at existing data on 300 veterans and non-veterans, some of whom are receiving care, some who are in and out of treatment, and some who receive no care. At least 18 months of data have been collected on this population in three previous VA studies led by Dr. Fischer.

A sub-sample of 32 people—16 veterans and 16 non-veterans—will be identified from those who cycle in and out of treatment. In-depth qualitative interviews will be conducted not only with the consumer subject but also with a family member or close friend. Dr. Fischer said the interviews with family or friends will explore "what it is they do that makes it easier for their family member or friend to stay in treatment."

She added, "We are also interested in what providers do to make it worthwhile for people with schizophrenia to stay involved in care."

While this research on sustained involvement is ongoing, Dr. Fischer will also work with another CeMHOR research team looking at treatment retention of veterans diagnosed with psychotic disorders (see page 1 story this issue).

Her research using stakeholders will complement the treatment retention study without duplicating it, she said. "Both will address treatment attrition, but they approach it from different perspectives and involve different populations."

Dr. Fischer's stakeholder grant research team will use a regional population of veterans and non-veterans with a single psychotic disorder, schizophrenia. About half of them receive services through VA and half from non-VA providers. The treatment retention grant project will use a much larger database: the national population of veterans with

psychotic disorders receiving VA services. That study does not include non-VA consumers.

"The aims and approaches of the two projects dovetail beautifully. The overlap will greatly benefit both studies as well as veterans and the VA healthcare system," Dr. Fischer concluded. ⁴

Treatment retention grant *(continued from front page)*

Investigators Richard R. Owen, MD, Ellen Fischer, PhD, and Teresa Hudson, PharmD, will participate in research activities from CeMHOR's site in North Little Rock.

A white paper issued in 1999 by SMITREC, and recent research by the Mental Health QUERI (Quality Enhancement Research Initiative), underscore problems inherent in treatment retention of veterans with psychotic disorders—one of the most vulnerable populations treated in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) system. In the year the white paper was issued, the VA provided services to 191,606 veterans diagnosed with a psychotic disorder.

The SMITREC white paper raised significant concerns about the impact of VHA changes on the care of veterans with psychoses, including high rates of drop out from mental health treatment and high mortality.

Tracking veterans who received inpatient care for psychosis during two fiscal years, SMITREC found that two years later 20% had died and 10% were thought to be alive but not receiving any services from the VHA.

QUERI researchers found that 28% of veterans with schizophrenia who received either inpatient or outpatient care from the VHA in 1998 did not get either inpatient or outpatient care from the VHA the next year. Both Dr. Owen, Principal Investigator, and Dr. Hudson, Co-investigator, work on the QUERI project, which

focuses on improving treatment outcomes for veterans with schizophrenia.

The VHA is concerned that its shift in treatment emphasis over the past five or six years not reduce the agency's capacity to provide treatment and rehabilitation for disabled veterans, including those with psychotic disorders. The shift involves more emphasis on outpatient care following shorter inpatient visits.

As part of the grant project activities, researchers in Ann Arbor and North Little Rock will look at patterns of VA mental and physical health care and medication utilization in relationship to retention; factors associated with retention and loss to VHA care; and causes and predictors of mortality, comparing those who were and were not lost to care.

The Psychosis Registry to be used in this research study was developed by SMITREC to monitor care delivered to all veterans with psychoses who have received treatment from the VA since 1988. It contains data on more than 750,000 unique veterans. ⁴

Grant Title: "Determinants of Treatment Retention for Veterans with Psychoses"

Awardee: HSR&D Center of Excellence, Ann Arbor, MI

Principal Investigator: Frederic C. Blow, PhD, Ann Arbor

Collaboration Site: CeMHOR, North Little Rock, AR

CeMHOR Site Investigators: Richard R. Owen, MD; Ellen Fischer, PhD; and Teresa Hudson, PharmD

Start Date: July 1, 2001

Total CeMHOR Funding: \$201,709

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Catching up with:

Tony DiBlasi

Job title: Computer Specialist (HSR&D & South Central MIRECC).

What I actually do: Write MUMPS routines to extract VISTA data. I'm presently developing data analyses using PC SAS software.

Where I learned to speak in acronyms: 24 years in the Air Force. MUMPS is a computer programming language used by VISTA, and SAS is a database software. I'm taking raw MUMPS data and using SAS software for the personal computer to develop analyses.

Number of years at CeMHOR: 2 1/2.

Projects on which I have worked: Dementia, QUERI, Schizophrenia Guidelines, & Weekly Appointment data extracts (Oklahoma City & Shreveport).

What I like most about my job: The people with whom I work.

The most challenging thing about my job is: Keeping M&M's on my desk.

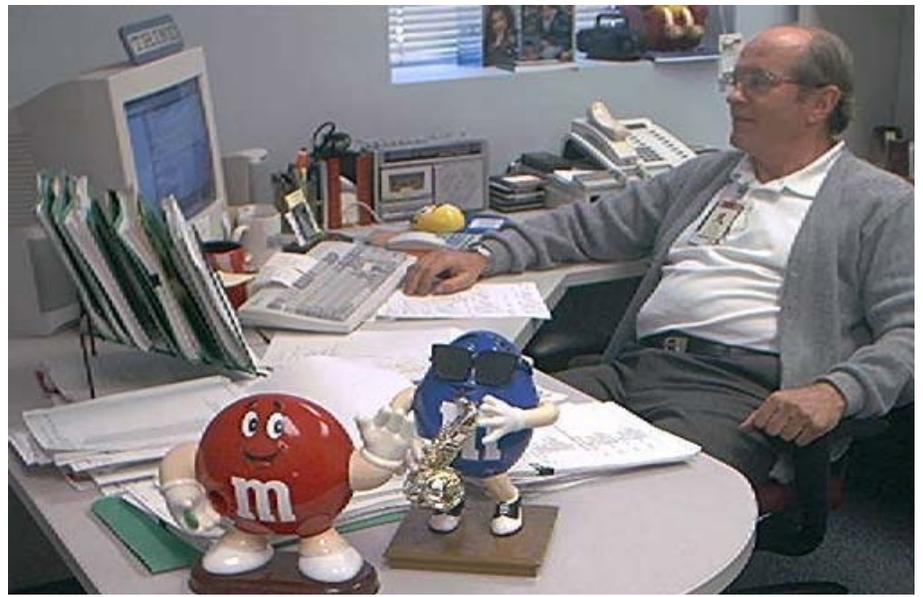
My biggest job accomplishment at CeMHOR: Getting all Schizophrenia Guidelines sites to run MUMPS routines and send the data to us.

The most interesting job I've had (excluding my present one, of course): Building a house. I have always been a goal-setter, so building my house has been a rewarding experience.

What I did before joining CeMHOR: I worked in Fiscal Service where I was the Windows NT Administrator for 40 employees, a computer programmer, and Information Security Officer for Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System.

How many packages of M&M's I dispense in a week, a month? About four a month unless Mark Austen is at work.

My most frequent office visitor for the purpose of eating my M&M's is: Mark Austen.



Tony DiBlasi: CeMHOR computer specialist, M&M dispenser and part-time home builder

Who is this Mark Austen: He's a statistician with a big appetite for M&Ms. Too bad his office is next to mine!

If I weren't doing this, I would be: Building my house and traveling.

What I like to do in my spare time: Spend time with my four children and my grandchildren and work on my house.

Editor's Notes:

Tony was recognized recently for 40 years of government service, more than 24 years in the Air Force and almost 16 with the VA. He started building his house after several years of weekends spent observing home construction in the Little Rock area.

He designed his 2,300-square-foot, all-brick home, bought a wooded lot in the country and started construction in summer 2000. He contracted out the



work he couldn't do himself.

"It's a low maintenance home with cellulose insulation and geothermal heating and cooling," Tony said.

He is presently living in the house, but he estimates it will take another six months to complete it and to landscape the lot. 4

On the web...

CeMHOR is now on line and accessible at:

www.va.gov/cemhor

or through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Intranet at:

vaww.va.gov/cemhor

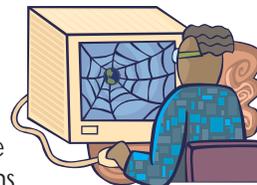
Two employees who worked on developing the web page continue to monitor it and work on problems associated with links, according to Ralph Suarez, VA administrative officer for CeMHOR.

"Dani Cothorn and John Heckler have done an excellent job of making the site Section 508-compliant," he said. "This sec-

tion of the law stipulates that federal web pages must be accessible to persons with disabilities. Dani and John worked with VHA web operations staff, using a manual on starting web pages."

Plans are to expand the site's contents to include forms used by CeMHOR staff, the newsletter and other items of interest to staff.

Each CeMHOR investigator has his/her own page on the site with links to recent publications (and sites with abstracts for them), grants and professional affiliations. 4



Changes in CeMHOR assignments

By Richard R. Owen, MD, Director

Congratulations to Rick Smith, the new chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock.

CeMHOR staff members have known Rick and had the pleasure of working with him since he founded CeMHOR in 1990. Some knew him before then and have worked with him over the years since he joined the UAMS department in 1981.

Rick's stature as a researcher and the respect he commands nationally within the academic and VA communities ensure that the department is in capable hands. We look forward to working with Rick and continuing the tradition he began 11 years ago with CeMHOR.

This new academic appointment necessitated Rick's resignation as Director of the Centers for Mental Healthcare Research, a division within the Department, and prompted new assignments for three very capable investigators:

- **Brenda Booth, PhD**, a biostatistician, has been named Rick's replacement to direct the Centers on an interim basis. Brenda has

served the Centers as Associate Director since 1995. She will continue as a CeMHOR Core Investigator.

- **John Fortney, PhD**, a medical geographer, Director of the VA Fellowship Training Program and Associate Director of the NIMH Fellowship Program, has been appointed Associate Director of the NIMH Center for Mental Healthcare Research. John joined CeMHOR after completing a post-doctoral fellowship here in 1995.

- **Geoff Curran, PhD**, will transition into the fellowship training program positions held by John. A sociologist, Geoff came to CeMHOR in 1998 as Assistant Director of the Mental Health QUERI. Over the coming year he will work closely with John to assume responsibilities for the two fellowship programs.

We congratulate Brenda, John and Geoff on their new assignments and offer them our assistance and support. 4

CeMHOR welcomes new post-doctoral Fellows and new staff member

- **Farah Farahati, PhD**, Fellow, completed a doctorate in economics last May at Northern Illinois University, doing research on the impact of mental illness on schooling and labor market performance.

She has been invited to present a paper this fall—on the impact of four major mental disorders on adults' income and labor force participation—at the Southern Economics Association conference in Tampa, Florida.

For a forthcoming paper on the impact of comorbid alcohol dependence/abuse and other psychiatric disorders on employment, Dr. Farahati will use data collected by Brenda Booth, PhD, her mentor at CeMHOR, on rural and urban problem drinking in six southern states.

Dr. Farahati holds an MA in economics from Western Illinois University and a BA from Tehran University.

- **Puru Thapa, MD**, Fellow, started his psychiatry residency in 1998 at UAMS after teaching preventive medicine at Vanderbilt for eight years.

He earned an MD degree from King George's Medical College in India and a Master of Public Health degree in epidemiology from the University of Washington, Seattle. He was co-investigator and/or project director for studies on preventing falls in nursing homes, antidepressant use and risk of falls and fall-related injuries, neurologic illness in children, sudden cardiac death and antipsychotic use.

Dr. Thapa will study PRN psychotropic medication use in the state hospital and assist Dr. Richard R. Owen in a VA project looking at the influence of patient factors on antipsychotic prescribing practices for schizophrenia.

- **Mike Glenn** joins the VA staff to work with the Mental Health QUERI. He retired from the Air Force after 21 years and serving as an Instructional Systems Developer and Training Administrator. He and his wife have two sons: a senior at Arkansas State who was recently called to active duty with the Arkansas Air National Guard, and a sophomore at Northeast Oklahoma A&M. Mike is working toward a BS in Human Resources from Park University, Little Rock Air Force Base. 4

Dr. Smith receives new UAMS appointment

G. Richard Smith, Jr., MD, CeMHOR founder and former director, has been appointed Marie Wilson Howells Professor and Chair, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

A nationally recognized expert in quality and outcomes research and outcomes management system implementation, Dr. Smith was the first director of the VA HSR&D Field Program for Mental Health, a forerunner of CeMHOR. He served as director from 1990 to 1998 and since then has been a Core Investigator and Steering Committee member.

Dr. Smith holds the distinction of having founded and directed UAMS research entities that support health services research in both the public and private domains. They include the Centers for Mental Healthcare Research, one of the largest, most comprehensive mental health services research groups in the nation; the Center for Outcomes Research and Effectiveness; the National Institutes of Mental Health Center for Mental Healthcare Research; and the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, a think tank cosponsored by the Arkansas Department of Health. 4