



NSCU honors Guard

Glenn Martin, a veteran and a certified medical aide with the Nursing Skilled Care Unit in Vancouver, recently wanted to honor the Oregon Air National Guard for its work following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the East Coast.

So Martin, who, like many of us, had seen media stories about the Guard being mobilized to deal with security issues in the region, conceived the idea of presenting the Guard with a plaque designed by residents of the NSCU (the unit provides long-term skilled nursing care for disabled veterans).

Martin wrote the inscription and staff and residents of the unit, expressed their support for the idea of inviting the Guard to Vancouver. John Schulling, a recreation therapist with the NSCU, said Vicky Kvenbo, with the Vancouver Sign Shop, was responsible for taking his idea and making it "concrete."

Two colonels, a host of master sergeants and several enlisted Airmen came for the presentation Jan. 29 in the NSCU dining room.

Schulling said Guardsmen were so moved, "They wanted to come back and get another chance to connect with the veterans. The officers particularly felt

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Mood Disorder Clinic to provide better understanding of bipolar disorder

The Mood Disorder Clinic here is recruiting patients for a national clinical trial focused on treating bipolar disorder. Peter Hauser, M.D., chief of Psychiatry, is a co-investigator in a study that involves 16 centers nationwide. The study, funded through the year 2004, will assess treatment strategies for bipolar disorder in more than 5,000 patients.

Bipolar disorder is characterized by "extreme changes in mood, thought, energy and behavior," according to the National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association. As the name implies, patients typically cycle between two poles; one pole is represented by manic activity, irritability, distractibility and grandiose self-esteem. The other pole is the depressive state—an excessive need for sleep, the loss of "joy" associated with normal activities, hopelessnesses and suicidal thoughts or other symptoms. (A clinical diagnosis of the condition depends of the presence of a certain number of symptoms marking each pole; all of the symptoms need not be present.)

During mania, patients with bipolar disorder may engage in types of sexual activity that they



Erick Turner, M.D.

would never consider when not in the throes of a mood swing, may go on spending sprees and may become very irritable. These patterns of behavior, mixed with lethargy, persistent irritability, fatigue and other symptoms associated with the depressive pole of the disorder, can have severe effects on a patient's employability, his or her relationships and the stability of his or her lifestyle. According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, about 2.3 million American adults are diagnosed with bipolar disorder

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Bipolar disorder: extensive study needed for a real-world population

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(about 1.25 million adults). Roughly 25 percent of those who are not treated for the disease commit suicide, according to researchers at Harvard University Medical School.

Erick Turner, M.D., says the research program is needed because there has never been a long-term extensive study of the disease.

“Most of the clinical trials for treating the disorder have been done on a pristine patient population,” says Turner, medical director of the Mood Disorder Clinic. “The patients have typically been 18-65 years old. The elderly have been excluded, along with anyone who has any other diagnosis or is on any other medication.”

Turner says, “In the real world, patients aren’t always under 65. There is comorbidity (the patient has at least one other diagnosed medical condition), and drugs that worked well in clinical trials on a pristine population might work differently on a real-world population.”

Turner notes, for example, that antidepressants have for years been used to treat bipolar depression, but there is relatively little “rigorously collected data” about the outcome of this type of intervention. And the fact is, antidepressants may make trigger manic episodes in bipolar patients and cause them to cycle more frequently, he adds.

PVAMC looks to enroll about 350 patients in the study, says

Rachel Schultz, a Research Assistant with the Mental Health Division. Officially known as the Systematic Treatment Enhancement Program for Bipolar Disorder, or “STEP-BD,” the study will require veterans to chart their moods daily, and will look extensively at their medical and social history, says Macy Woodside, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with the team.

While there is a long-term goal—acquiring enough data to make effective clinical decisions for a diverse population — patients may see immediate benefits. “They’re going to get much more attention in this study, per visit, than they would in the community at large,” says Lori Danker, Nurse Practitioner.

“Research staff collect information about how the patient is doing, using rating scales for the study, but also give the patient’s (mental health care) provider assessment information, and that should help the patient’s treatment.”

Ashlee Thornton, a Research Assistant with the team, points out that each member of the research team has received specialized training in assessing mood disorders.

After more than a year of preparation, the team has 24 patients awaiting formal enrollment in the study. For information about the study, or to refer a patient, call Ashlee Thornton at 503-220-8262, Ext. 57429, or

Macy Woodside at Ext. 56198.

If you’d like to learn more about Mood Disorders, please consider attending Turner’s talk about Seasonal Affective Disorder Wednesday from 5:30 to 7 p.m. in the Medical Center Auditorium. Turner will discuss how low light levels in winter are related to the disorder. His talk will include a demonstration of how light boxes are used to treat the condition.

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NSCU designs plaque

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that younger servicemembers would benefit from visiting older veterans.”

The plaque reads: *To the Oregon Air National Guard: We have all been where you are now. We have all borne the weight of battle in one form or another.*

But the total sum of our efforts would mean nothing if it were not for those who came after us, answering the call to freedom’s challenges and giving of themselves. Our thoughts are with you and all those who strive to preserve our country’s freedom. From the Veterans of the V.A. Nursing Skilled Care Unit, Vancouver, Wash., January 2002.