

## **New Manual Developed to Provide General Mental Health Practitioners With Substance Abuse Education For Effective Implementation of Dual Diagnosis Treatment Guidelines**

Kristen Barry (Ph.D.) and Frederic Blow (Ph.D.), researchers at the Serious Mental Illness Treatment Research and Evaluation Center (SMITREC), have developed a manual on the recognition and treatment of substance abuse problems in patients with serious and persistent mental illnesses. The manual is targeted to general mental health specialists in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and it has been developed as part of a field-tested national training program in substance abuse developed by Theodore Parran, M.D. at the Cleveland VA Medical Center.

General mental health specialists often have limited training in substance abuse treatment, and this may be a significant hurdle to the implementation of the VHA's new dual diagnosis treatment guidelines. Veterans with serious mental illness (SMI) represent a large, treatment intensive patient group in the VHA, and estimates of substance abuse among people with SMI range from 25 to 75 percent (depending upon the substance abuse diagnosis and the reporting mechanism). Substance abuse has been shown to adversely affect mental health outcomes in the areas of psychosocial functioning, psychiatric symptoms, and treatment progress.

The manual is designed to help providers meet a number of learning objectives in training to handle issues of substance use. The manual describes screening techniques in the identification of problematic substance use and provides steps for performing a brief intervention with a substance-using patient. It also addresses when and how a treatment plan may effectively be negotiated with patients and when referral to specialized substance abuse treatment is appropriate.

This manual has been developed in conjunction with a study which will examine if administering a substance abuse educational package to providers results in improved treatment outcomes. The study is being conducted by Richard McCormick, Ph.D., and Dr. Parran at the Cleveland VA Medical center with the collaboration of the SMITREC researchers. In the study, the educational package will be administered prior to the implementation of the Dual Diagnosis Practice Guidelines at two multispecialty group practices. At two other multispecialty practices, the guidelines will be implemented without the prior education of staff. The study will test if use of the educational package results in increased documentation that key elements of the guidelines are accomplished, and it will test if outcomes are better for patients at these practices than those for comparable patients in the control multispecialty practices. As of November 1999, the study was in the follow-up data collection stage.