

FALL 2011

# INSIGHTS

DAVID B. FALK COLLEGE OF SPORT AND HUMAN DYNAMICS SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

DAVID B. FALK  
COLLEGE OF SPORT  
AND  
HUMAN DYNAMICS

## DEFINING MOMENT

Falk Family Makes  
\$15 Million Gift

# A Commitment to Veterans

**SOCIAL WORK ALUMNI, INTERNS  
FULFILL MANY NEEDS AT  
SYRACUSE VA MEDICAL CENTER**

Upon entering the Syracuse VA Medical Center, a person can't help but notice the sincere and compassionate staff, the welcoming family-friendly waiting areas, and a deep camaraderie amongst the veterans regardless of age, military branch, or deployments.

And the care is first rate, according to the patients.

The Syracuse facility has consistently ranked in the top three on the national list of VA medical centers for patient satisfaction.

In addition to the main Syracuse VA Medical Center, the network offers primary and behavioral health care in a 13-county area of Central New York through its community-based outpatient clinics in Auburn, Binghamton, Freeville, Massena, Oswego, Rome, and Watertown.

It currently employs 65 professional social workers—many of them alumni of the Syracuse University School of Social Work. The medical center and its affiliates also serve as hands-on training sites for students in the M.S.W. program (see sidebar, page 18.)

"We offer a very rich experience to students because they can

touch all aspects of care," says

Kathleen Glow-Morgan

'90, M.S.W. '97,

LCSW-R,

social

work executive for the Syracuse VA Medical Center, who provides administrative and clinical oversight for the social work staff and field placement program. “Our collaborative, interdisciplinary team takes care of patients and helps us take care of one another and ourselves, which is an important philosophy students can benefit from.”

The VA’s social work professionals, and the interns they guide, are responsible for case management, administration, clinical assessments, and outreach/education in areas that include specialty services specific to growing numbers of returning young veterans of conflicts in the Middle East. These include homelessness reduction; treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and military sexual trauma (MST); and palliative care. While their roles vary, the professional social work staff is united by its commitment to veterans.

“The chance to participate in a vet’s healing is incredibly rewarding,” says Shawne E. Steiger M.S.W. ’91, LCSW-R, who is the PTSD clinical team lead. Steiger’s team of three psychologists and three social workers offers a range of treatment options for veterans with PTSD related to a trauma that occurred during active duty military service, such as combat, sexual assault, or a training accident.

She and her team provide services that are especially critical with many veterans under 30 years old who were involved in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn



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—LAUREN LOVE

(OND). Additionally, many older retired veterans are now realizing they have symptoms consistent with PTSD that may have been masked for years. Consequently, it is a service area that continues to grow consistent with the number of veterans served by the facility. In the mid-1990s, the Syracuse VA served 18,500 veterans. Today, more than 41,000 veterans are served and this number continues to grow.

Lauren Love B.S.S.W. ’86, LCSW-R, is the program manager for OEF/OIF/OND serving returning combat veterans from the Middle East. She was responsible for building this program from the ground up in 2005. The program informs combat veterans of available VA benefits and

also screens them for PTSD, depression, substance use, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and environmental exposures. Ongoing care management and advocacy for OEF/OIF/OND veterans with other agencies are also essential aspects of her job.

“At SU, I built skills in casework, community organizing, research, and administration, which prepared me for the things I do today,” says Love, whose career goal was initially focused on school social work, though she began her professional work in health care. “I remember watching the news reports on September 11, 2001. I wanted to help and be involved,” she reflects. “By October of that year, I was working at the VA. I’ve built a program that

**Left to right: (standing): Shawne E. Steiger, Kathleen Glow-Morgan, Adam Ormsby, Janice Creamer. Left to right (seated) Ruth Strodel, Lauren Love**

supports many veterans and their families. The rewards of this work are tremendous.”

Similar to Love, Adam J. Ormsby’s early career path began outside of hospital social work. Ormsby M.S.W. ’94, LCSW, is an Air Force veteran who was activated during the Persian Gulf War when he was studying advanced psychology. Upon his return, he changed his academic program to social work. “When I walked through the doors of the VA, I felt an immediate connection to veterans and their families. I would encourage students not to fear walking through the open door of opportunity, as very special things could await.”

Ormsby, the team leader for the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program at Syracuse is

leading the Veterans Homelessness Prevention Demonstration (VHPD) Program focused on President Obama’s directive to end homelessness amongst veterans. According to national statistics, 107,000 male and female veterans are homeless on any given night, and twice that number experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year. Veterans represent 13 percent (over one out of eight persons in homeless shelters) of the total sheltered adult population.

Currently, the Syracuse VA-run site is one of five nationally developing models for successful intervention strategies as part of the Obama administration’s five-year plan. The administration’s goal is to eliminate homelessness among veterans by ensuring

all eligible homeless and at-risk veterans have access to the programs and services available to them. The case management includes locating and informing veterans about the services and care for which they are eligible since many do not realize what the VA can offer.

“We go out into the community to find our veterans who are homeless—whether that is on the streets or under bridges. We walk them through our system and place them into safe housing, doing what we can to engage them and keep them there. We advocate for them,” Ormsby says.

Another important initiative under the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program is the Veteran Justice Outreach Initiative (VJO), which is run by VJO

## School of Social Work-VA Medical Center FIELD INSTRUCTION PARTNERSHIP

Student interns have been placed at the Syracuse VA Medical Center in various positions and geographies, including Syracuse and the Fort Drum area in Watertown, since 1958, according to Bette Thoreck, assistant director of field instruction in the School of Social Work.

This past year, five students were placed at the Syracuse VA Medical Center, including service at the hospital and the off-site VA Behavioral Health Center. One M.S.W. student was placed with the Rome VA Outpatient Clinic working with homeless veterans, and two M.S.W. students were placed at Fort Drum in the U.S. Army Medical Activity Unit.

Students placed on the medical social work floors in the hospital conduct bio-psycho-socio assessments, provide support for patients and family members, attend interdisciplinary medical staff meetings, and do discharge

planning and resource referral. They also determine safety needs for discharge, research legal rights and outpatient services available to veterans, coordinate inpatient and outpatient care, maintain accurate medical records, and identify any ethical concerns when they arise.

Students placed in the Behavioral Health Center provide individual therapy and facilitate group sessions with veterans suffering from PTSD and mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Students are also asked to do bio-psycho-socio assessments, develop treatment plans, and make community referrals.

Students in the Rome Clinic work with homeless veterans via outreach, assessment, relationship development, resource referral, emergency assistance, and education about services available through the VA.

coordinator, Kynna Murphy, M.S.W. '94, LCSW-R.

The program's goal is to avoid unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among veterans by ensuring eligible justice-involved veterans have timely access to the mental health, substance abuse and other services available to them as veterans.

On any given night, there are more than 63,000 veterans in jails across the United States, many whom are homeless. Murphy travels all over New York State, from the Pennsylvania border to the Canadian border, covering a 14-county geography in search of veterans in the justice system. Whether she meets with them in booking or behind bars, her message is the same. "I tell them I'm not a judge and I'm not a lawyer. But I do reassure them the VA has not left them and wants to help."

Working with lawyers, judges, and probation officers, Murphy represents jailed veterans to identify alternatives to their incarceration, such as treatment for drug or alcohol addictions or mental health treatment options, which are more beneficial than prolonged time behind bars.

"The people I see are honorably discharged, decorated war veterans who have fought for our country. Many times, their behaviors that result in incarceration may have been inflicted through war-related traumas. They are often despondent and alone suffering from PTSD and other disorders. They are left behind from the support systems they have always known," says Murphy. "It is my

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—RUTH STRODEL

job to get them connected to the services they need and the benefits they deserve.”

Janice Creamer M.S.W. '95, LCSW-R, fills dual roles at the Syracuse VA Behavioral Health Outpatient Clinic, a new off-site facility located minutes away from the Syracuse VA Medical Center. Her primary responsibility is as a psychotherapist treating all types of psychiatric disorders. Additionally, she serves as the MST Coordinator where she is the point of contact for information and advocacy for staff and veterans.

“Treatment for MST is an area that continues to grow because more people are aware of it,” Creamer says. Through her advocacy work helping veterans affected by MST, she is grateful for the structure of the academic program at SU, including its focus on family systems. She often reflects upon the words of social work professor emeritus William McPeak. “Dr. McPeak always told us we would learn so much from our clients, and he was right,” Creamer says.

Like her colleagues, Ruth Strodel, B.S.S.W. '90 is focused on quality of life issues for veterans and their families. As the advanced illness care coordinator who is an integral part of the Center's

Palliative Care Consult Team, she works closely with physicians, nurse practitioners, and the VA chaplain. Much of Strodel's work revolves around acute care settings. She regularly meets with veterans and family members following a terminal diagnosis to provide support, planning, and community referrals.

“Decisions related to end-of-life care are something each one of us faces at some point in our lives. If I can help someone and his or her family be more comfortable, while helping them build on their strengths in a difficult time, then I am honored to help,” she says.

There is no team in the VA organization that is without a social worker on it. Glow-Morgan is a member of the Syracuse VA Medical Center's leadership team, which she credits to the comprehensive training in systems theory she received at SU. “As social workers, we are trained to see the whole picture, and the Syracuse VA as an organization is interested in how to provide the best comprehensive care that is seamless to patients and their families,” she says.

When Glow-Morgan joined the VA three years ago, there were approximately 30 social workers. Now that number has doubled and

continues to grow. Construction is well under way on a six-floor addition to house a new spinal cord injury/disease center with a therapeutic pool, expanded outpatient services, expanded dialysis unit, and seven new operating rooms. This expansion

will require more social workers, which is great news for students of social work—and current social workers.

“As we grow as an organization, we continue to ask ourselves, how do we continue to excel?” notes Glow-Morgan.

“Our 65-plus social work staff truly enjoys working together as a team and knows this organization values them. Consequently, at the end of the day we feel good about what we are doing, where we’re doing it and, most of all, that we are doing the right things for our vets.”

## TRAINING VETERANS FOR TRAUMA RESEARCH



THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, FOOD STUDIES, AND NUTRITION is pleased to announce a new program for veterans of the U.S. armed services interested in becoming trauma researchers led by associate professor Brooks Gump as part of a collaborative project between SU and SUNY Oswego.

Sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the joint effort has created a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU), which includes a month-long program in June 2012 on the shores of Lake Ontario. “For undergraduates interested in graduate school, it can sometimes be challenging to find meaningful research experiences that offer hands-on opportunities coupled with close work and mentoring with skilled faculty researchers. The REU program is an ideal way to gain valuable research experience,” notes Gump.

Participating in this experience-rich, hands-on research opportunity with faculty mentors, students will develop their research skills while increasing marketability for admission to competitive graduate programs. In addition to training on research methods, students will participate in an intensive four-week summer research program at SUNY Oswego from June 4-29, 2012—and earn \$3,000 by attending it. As students continue being mentored by their faculty, they will conduct research on a trauma-related topic and present their findings.

For veterans pursuing an undergraduate degree who may be interested in this training, contact Dorothy Wright at 315-443-5929, or e-mail [dowright@syr.edu](mailto:dowright@syr.edu), for an application. The application is also available online at [falk.syr.edu](http://falk.syr.edu). The deadline is January 10, 2012.