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Dr. Robert Parker: Serving at the Providence VAMC and in Africa

Service to something greater than one's self is something that sets veterans apart. VA employees serve those who served our country, and some serve in other ways, too, such as volunteering. **DR. ROBERT PARKER**, a surgeon at the Providence VA Medical Center, is one of them. He splits his time between Rhode Island and Kenya.

"I went to medical school because I wanted to deliver health care to populations without it," said Dr. Parker. "Medicine is a calling and I've seen how it can change the life of an individual, and entire communities, too."

Dr. Parker spent a year in Kenya, working on esophageal cancer research with **DR. RUSS WHITE**, a thoracic surgeon associated with Brown University who spends the majority of his time at Tenwek Hospital in Kenya.

The connection enabled Dr. Parker and his wife, **DR. ANDREA PARKER**, to do their surgery residency training in Providence, where Dr. Parker did some training at the VA medical center, and where he continued to work after residency.

In 2015, he moved to Kenya with his family to work at Tenwek, where he and his wife practice medicine and teach surgery.

"The challenges we face can be immense," said Dr. Parker, "but more incredible are the solutions we develop through partnerships with organizations from the community through global levels."

Today he continues to serve both veterans at the Providence VAMC, and patients in Kenya.

"I'm grateful to Brown University and the VA hospital in Providence," Dr. Parker said. "My work at VA allows us to volunteer, training local doctors and providing care for patients in Kenya who may not otherwise have access to the care they need." ❖

Story courtesy Providence VAMC.



Dr. Robert Parker, a surgeon at the Providence VA Medical Center, performs surgery at Tenwek Hospital in Kenya. PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. ROBERT PARKER



Dr. Robert Parker, a surgeon at the Providence VA Medical Center, lectures medical and surgical residents at the Providence VAMC on December 15, 2017. PROVIDENCE VA MEDICAL CENTER PHOTO BY KIMBERLY DIDONATO

Memory and Aging Program (MAP) at Butler participating in new Alzheimer's prevention study

Investigating whether an oral medication, known as CNP520, can slow the build-up of amyloid plaques

PROVIDENCE – Recently, the Memory and Aging Program (MAP) at Butler Hospital enrolled one of the initial participants in an international Alzheimer's disease (AD) prevention study. The study is investigating whether an oral medication, known as CNP520, can slow the build-up of amyloid plaques in the brain and delay cognitive decline in individuals at risk for the disease. Amyloid build-up is one of the major causes of AD and can begin up to two decades before the onset of the clinical symptoms.

Butler Hospital is one of 185 research centers across 25 countries participating in Generation 2. The study seeks to enroll 850 people in the United States and 2,000 people worldwide. As a randomized, double-blind study, neither the research team nor the participants are aware of whether the drug or a placebo is being administered in the form of a daily pill. Participants will be followed for five to eight years, with regular follow-up evaluations to identify changes in brain amyloid through brain imaging, cognitive function through testing, and tracking of other disease biomarkers.

The new study, called Generation 2, is a clinical trial sponsored by Novartis Pharmaceuticals in collaboration with Banner Alzheimer's Institute and Amgen. The trial is designed for cognitively healthy adults, age 60 to 75 years old, who carry at least one copy of the *APOE4* gene and have a build-up of cerebral amyloid in the brain, both risk markers for Alzheimer's.

STEPHEN SALLOWAY, MD, MS, director of MAP and professor of neurology and psychiatry at the Alpert Medical School, calls this a landmark event in the fight against Alzheimer's. He remarked, "This exciting trial brings together advances in genetics, brain imaging, and pharmacology to test a medication to prevent or delay memory loss in people at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease." ❖

Rhode Island Hospital joins nationwide research network

NIH-funded effort fosters emergency medicine research on a large scale

PROVIDENCE – Rhode Island Hospital has joined a cadre of other medical centers nationally serving as hubs for the Strategies to Innovate EmeRgENcy Care Clinical Trials Network (SIREN). The network facilitates improved coordination and sharing of lifesaving emergency medicine research around the treatment of gravely serious conditions, such as traumatic brain injury, cardiopulmonary arrest, and sepsis.

Nationally, the network is composed of 11 hubs, each consisting of a group of hospitals. Rhode Island Hospital and its academic affiliate The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University lead a group that includes the emergency services of Rhode Island Hospital's pediatric division, Hasbro Children's Hospital, The Miriam Hospital, Newport Hospital, Women & Infants Hospital, and the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center in Baltimore, Maryland.

The project is led by principal investigator **LISA H. MERCK, MD, MPH**, an emergency medicine attending physician at Rhode Island Hospital and director of the Division of Emergency Neurosciences at Brown University's Alpert Medical School.

The Rhode Island Hospital SIREN hub has also entered into a five-year agreement to form a "superhub" within the SIREN network, known as the COalition for REsearch in Emergency Medicine (CORE-EM Alliance). The alliance includes five other leading emergency medicine research centers: Emory University, Tufts University, University of Arizona, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, and Orlando Regional Medical Center. The CORE-EM Alliance is composed of 23 Level I trauma centers and serves an encatchment area of approximately 53 million patients.

"The CORE-EM Alliance is a collaborative effort to advance research in resuscitative medicine. We are excited to partner with other leading research centers to further advance the work of the SIREN network," said Merck. "These centers cover a substantial portion of the eastern seaboard and southeast. Individually, each center will bring a great deal of expertise to the collaboration and together, CORE-EM will serve a large, diverse patient population. Our combined numbers and collaborative expertise will enable us to contribute in a meaningful way to advancing research in resuscitative medicine."

CORE-EM will be joining SIREN to conduct several large-scale studies of 1,000-plus patients over the next five years. Each of the six hubs within the CORE-EM Alliance is affiliated with multiple hospitals. The model is flexible and efficient, with the ability to transition seamlessly from six independent research centers, up to 30-plus enrolling hospital sites. ❖

Care New England, Partners HealthCare announce plans to form definitive agreement

PROVIDENCE – Care New England Health System (CNE), and Partners HealthCare of Massachusetts have agreed to enter into a definitive agreement, the next step in the process for CNE to become part of Partners HealthCare.

The January 25th announcement comes after a 10-month due diligence process, which has resulted in a plan for CNE to regain solid financial footing in the coming years was approved by the Boards of Directors of Care New England and Partners HealthCare. The definitive agreement represents a more formal document that would outline the details and plans for the actual transaction. Following the development and execution of the definitive agreement, it is expected the organizations would move forward with the needed state and federal regulatory approvals. Both CNE and Partners hope to develop and execute the definitive agreement as soon as possible.

As a result of the announcement, the existing letter of intent (LOI) and exclusivity has been extended until such a time as a definitive agreement has been executed.

Care New England has maintained a close working relationship with Partners HealthCare since 2009 through a clinical affiliation with Brigham and Women's Hospital (one of the founding members of Partners) in cardiology, and vascular, thoracic, and colorectal surgery. In addition, there has been a long-standing collaborative and collegial relationship between McLean Hospital (a Partners hospital) and Care New England's Butler Hospital to provide high-quality behavioral health care and innovative research locally within the Rhode Island community.

The plan to move forward with a definitive agreement includes Kent Hospital in Warwick; Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island in Providence;

the VNA of Care New England, based in Warwick; Butler Hospital in Providence; and The Providence Center in several Rhode Island locations. Under the proposal, the strong educational and research relationship that CNE has fostered with Brown University will continue to play a critical role in the health care landscape and its future development.

Said CNE President and CEO **JAMES E. FANALE, MD**, "We look forward to the opportunity this now affords and what it means for the delivery of high-quality health care for our patients, the community we serve, and our vital academic partnerships. We will continue to focus our efforts on the remaining work while doing so with perseverance that reflects the needs of our patients and the ever-changing health care landscape." ❖

Bradley Hospital, Riverside Community Care launch BRAVE Study for Anxious Youth

Study examines effective form of talk therapy to learn what makes it successful in practice

PROVIDENCE – The Pediatric Anxiety Research Center at Bradley Hospital is partnering with Massachusetts' Riverside Community Care, a behavioral health care and human service organization, to learn what makes exposure therapy successful. Exposure therapy is a form of talk therapy that is already known to be safe and highly effective for treating anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Exposure therapy has been studied for over 50 years in more than 150 clinical trials and is very effective at all ages. National practice guidelines recommend it as a first-line treatment for anxiety or OCD. It involves working with a trained therapist to complete exposures – practice situations where people gradually learn to face fears over time. "Exposures are a manageable way to learn through experience that most fears don't come true – and when they sometimes do, it's not as scary as you might have thought," said **KRISTEN BENITO, PhD**, Bradley Hospital researcher and principal investigator for the study.

Despite being very effective, exposure therapy is not widely available to those affected by anxiety or OCD. It is primarily used by specialists in academic and research clinics, and most practicing therapists do not have access to exposure therapy training. The BRAVE study hopes to start addressing this problem.

"We need to get this training to more therapists, but there is no standard for teaching what successful exposure therapy should 'look like.' Right now, that only exists in the heads of specialists," said Benito. "In an earlier study, we developed a brief exposure assessment tool based on hundreds of videotaped exposures with specialists. Our goal in the BRAVE study is to see whether this tool is useful for therapists and families, and whether it can tell them when exposure is 'on-track.'"

The study takes place in Riverside Community Care outpatient locations, where participating therapists receive specialized exposure training from the BRAVE research team. ❖

Bradley/Hasbro Children's Research Center awarded \$3.4M to develop pediatric anxiety outpatient treatment

PROVIDENCE – The Pediatric Anxiety Research Center (PARC) at the Bradley/Hasbro Children's Research Center, has received a \$3.4 million funding award from The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to compare patient-centered (primarily in the home/community) to provider-centered (primarily in the office) outpatient treatment for kids with anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). The aim of the study is to devise an alternative outpatient treatment model featuring a bachelor's level clinician, or mobile exposure coach, working in conjunction with PhDs to conduct in-home therapy visits.

"We know from our research and work with pediatric patients that exposure therapy is a highly effective behavioral treatment for anxiety and OCD, but it is very challenging for kids and families to practice those skills at home," said **JENNIFER FREEMAN, PhD**, director of research and training at PARC and the study's principal investigator. The current outpatient treatment model for youth with anxiety disorders includes shortages of appropriate providers, logistical problems with getting to treatment, and trouble getting an adequate dose of exposure treatment in the home. "We're exploring creation of a comprehensive patient care model that delivers home-based exposure coaching at an outpatient level of care to better meet the needs of families with anxious children."

The first evidence-based study of its kind, the five-year randomized trial will assess the effectiveness of the two treatments and provide data to determine the feasibility and acceptability of the model for families. More than 330 patients, ages five to 18 years old, seeking treatment for anxiety or OCD at PARC will be randomized to receive patient-centered treatment using home-based services

or traditional provider-centered care.

Anxiety disorders and OCD are among the most common and earliest of psychiatric disorders to occur among children and persist if left untreated, often leading to depression, substance abuse, suicide attempts, and disability into adulthood. "The need for this study stems from families asking us for more help following intensive treatment in our program, and we expect the results to validate the role of home-based treatment and create better access to care and patients and families who are more engaged in treatment," added Freeman.

In addition to patient and family engagement, the study will measure participants' anxiety and OCD symptoms and severity and functional impairment. Study results are expected to include identifying methods for increasing outpatient treatment access, continuation, effectiveness, and efficiency for kids with anxiety and OCD. In the longer term, project stakeholders – ranging from patients and their families to insurers – will contribute to establishing a new patient-centered service delivery model. "We are working to create a better, more accessible model of care for patients and families in need," said Freeman.

"This project was selected for PCORI funding not only for its scientific merit and commitment to engaging patients and other stakeholders, but also for its potential to fill an important gap in our health knowledge and give people information to help them weigh the effectiveness of their care options," said PCORI Executive Director **JOE SELBY, MD, MPH**. "We look forward to following the study's progress and working with PARC to share the results."

PARC's study was selected for PCORI funding through a highly competitive review process in which patients, clinicians and other stakeholders joined

clinical scientists to evaluate the proposals. Applications were assessed for scientific merit, how well they will engage patients and other stakeholders and their methodological rigor among other criteria.

Freeman's award has been approved pending completion of a business and programmatic review by PCORI staff and issuance of a formal award contract.

About The Pediatric Anxiety Research Center (PARC)

Located on Bradley Hospital's main campus in East Providence, Rhode Island, The Pediatric Anxiety Research Center (PARC) is a nationally recognized, integrated research and clinical program encompassing outpatient services and an intensive treatment program for anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). PARC's mission is to provide state-of-the-art assessment and behavioral and pharmacological treatment to children ages five to 18 who experience significant impairment in their daily lives due to anxiety and obsessive-compulsive (OC) spectrum disorders. Research on the etiology, phenomenology, maintenance, and course of child OCD, anxiety, and tic disorders is also conducted at PARC.

About The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)

PCORI is an independent, nonprofit organization authorized by Congress in 2010. Its mission is to fund research that will provide patients, their caregivers and clinicians with the evidence-based information needed to make better-informed healthcare decisions. For more information about PCORI's funding, visit www.pcori.org. ❖