



VA San Diego Healthcare System Public Affairs Office:
3350 La Jolla Village Drive (858) 552-4373
San Diego, CA 92161

News Release

CONTACT: David Haas
Phone: (858) 642-6383

VA San Diego Healthcare System Opens Regional Mental Health Center

SAN DIEGO (May 25, 2012) -- The VA San Diego Healthcare System has been selected to implement a new mental health program which will provide real-time mental health services via Internet link to Veterans across the Western United States who live long distances from their nearest VA treatment facilities.

Opened in April, the Telemental Health Center uses a secure internet connection and web camera to connect Veteran patients who would otherwise be unable to get psychotherapy treatment due to geographical constraints. Rather than traveling long distances for treatment for issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), patients can now connect with their therapist via webcam through the convenience of their local regional Vet center or VA outpatient clinic.

"The regional center is a place to provide evidence-based psychotherapy along with infrastructure for participating community-based outpatient clinics and staff," said Dr. Martin Paulus, Western regional director of telemental health. "This is the future of mental health care in the 21st century."

At its full capacity, the Telemental Health Center will treat up to 85 patients a week from areas as far away as Alaska and Guam. According to Paulus, this will save time for patients who normally would travel long distances to their regional VA medical center for care. Providing state-of-the-art psychotherapies to rural patients using the Telemental Health program will also allow staff to offer more appointments and allow more time to treat a greater number of serious mental health cases.

In addition to using current staff, VA San Diego Healthcare System plans to hire three psychologists and two support personnel to augment this new center.

VA San Diego is one of three regional locations selected for Veterans Affairs telemental health centers across the United States. The others are in Charleston, S.C. and San Antonio, Texas.

###