



UMMS Center for Mental Health Services Research Strategic Plan Executive Summary March 2013

Overview of the SPARC

The Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC), housed within the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) Department of Psychiatry, and a Massachusetts Department Mental Health (DMH) Center of Research Excellence, is a national leader in innovative, recovery-oriented, state-of-the-art psychosocial and systems research and training. We are a multi-disciplinary team of researchers, trainers, policy-advisors, and persons with lived experience dedicated to preventing the development or recurrence of mental health conditions, and improving the lives of individuals living with these challenges.

SPARC Assets

We have a strong track record of NIH funding, long-standing partnerships with many national foundations, and are deeply committed to state and local issues as evidenced by our numerous research and training grants with various state agencies and regional foundations. Since 2007, we have received 64 research grants and contracts totaling over 23 million dollars in external funding. Our faculty and staff are international leaders in areas that cut across the spectrum of behavioral health concerns. Examples of our nationally and internationally-recognized expertise include the work of Maryann Davis in transition-age youth and young adults, Tom Grisso and Gina Vincent in juvenile justice and assessment, Doug Ziedonis and David Smelson in co-occurring disorders and psychosocial therapies development and implementation, Chuck Lidz in bioethics, and Bill Fisher in systems research and the mental health-criminal justice interface. Other examples of our expertise include clubhouses through the Program for Clubhouse Research, vocational rehabilitation models, parenting and mental health, multicultural research, and wellness including tobacco cessation and mindfulness-based interventions. We have strong ties in the UMMS Department of Psychiatry with colleagues in the Child/Adolescent and Addictions divisions, the Center for Comparative Neuroimaging, and the National Center on Homelessness among Veterans. Our partnerships also extend to Commonwealth Medicine, several other UMMS departments, and the UMass Boston and Lowell campuses.

The UMMS Department of Psychiatry is becoming a national leader in recovery-oriented services research, in keeping with the SAMHSA definition of recovery: “A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential”. The SPARC hosts the Recovery Research Program, a Psychiatry Department-wide enterprise dedicated to studying and refining new models of care, and to developing, assessing and disseminating models of enhanced mental health care. Two exciting new initiatives include the first of its kind study of a system-wide, inpatient recovery model at the DMH Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital, and the US adaptation of the “Open Dialogue” approach to acute psychiatric crises, developed in Finland, that emphasizes patient-centered care, family involvement and social networks in recovery. In the area of prevention, the SPARC is leading and defining the state of the science through several ongoing initiatives. The new SAMHSA-funded UMMS Child Trauma Training Center is training police officers, pediatricians, and court officers working with traumatized children in central and Western Massachusetts, while the NIDRR-funded Transitions Research and Training Center is conducting cutting-edge research to test and inform interventions for transition age youth, while developing and translating this knowledge to inform individuals, service providers and policy-makers.

To ensure that our work is disseminated as quickly and effectively as possible, in order to speed the translation of research findings about effective psychosocial services into actual practice in the community, we have developed state-of-the art dissemination strategies including web-based and social media campaigns. These efforts resulted in over 21,000 product downloads in 2012 alone.

SPARC Opportunities

As the depth and breadth of our faculty increases, there are opportunities to **explore new funding mechanisms** to continue to diversify our financial base. Patient-centered service delivery, implementation science, information/communication technology, social determinants of health and disparities in mental health services and outcomes are all areas where we have a knowledge-base and see as important **research areas to target for growth**.

We recognize that **partnerships are more critical than ever**, especially in light of the increasingly collaborative and multidisciplinary nature of services research. Individuals living with serious and persistent mental health conditions have complex lives with multiple challenges, e.g., high rates of premature mortality, nicotine dependence, that are best addressed by experts across multiple disciplines. We are committed to **expanding our evaluation and training capacity** to showcase the expertise of our faculty and staff.

As we grow and evolve we must re-examine our **identity as a research center** and ensure that we are actualizing our vision, mission and goals. Finally, we recognize that as our capacity and resources have expanded, we must ensure that our **infrastructure** can support and sustain our growth.

Our Strategic Plan

January 2013 marks the launch of the SPARC Strategic Plan. Developed by the SPARC faculty and staff, in consultation with Department of Psychiatry and MA DMH leadership, this three-year plan is a roadmap to realizing our vision of *helping people living with mental health challenges lead happy and productive lives*.

Strategic Goals:

- Goal 1:** Increase national and international recognition of the SPARC.
- Goal 2:** Increase long-term financial stability through diversifying funding base and increasing revenue generating capacity.
- Goal 3:** Broaden and deepen collaborations within Psychiatry and with other departments at UMMS, DMH, Commonwealth Medicine, other UMass campuses, and state agencies.
- Goal 4:** Assure an organizational structure, resources, and facilities to meet demands going forward toward the other three goals in the Strategic Plan.

Our core areas of focus are very much aligned with the priorities of public mental health in general, and more specifically with the DMH. We recognize and are committed to the notion that for mental health services to be truly patient-centered and focused on recovery, more research is urgently needed about identifying patient-centered outcomes, measuring recovery, improving quality of care, workforce training, and the development of policies on this new model. We are excited to build on our strength of close partnerships with individuals with lived experience in an effort to understand what outcomes they identify as important, and the best research strategies for exploring these issues. Another urgent priority for mental health care in general and certainly for DMH is the alarming issue of health disparities for people with serious mental illness. Our patients die on average 25 years earlier compared to the general population from illnesses including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. By partnering with specialists in areas like preventative medicine and lifestyle change we can disseminate information about evidence-based interventions for modifiable risk factors and conduct studies of how best to adapt and implement these interventions for our population.

Next Steps

As the Strategic Plan is drafted and approved, our next step is implementation. We have identified SPARC leadership to spearhead the plan, and our faculty and staff are working on each of the goal areas. We have developed processes to monitor our progress, and have built-in feedback and support loops to help our work teams problem-solve as well as to ensure that we are maximizing the human capital of the SPARC. We are developing action plans with targeted timelines, and are continuing to survey the context and environment of our work to see if and where modifications are needed.