

## **Clozapine and High Blood Sugar in Veterans with Schizophrenia**

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers found previously undetected high blood sugar levels in nearly one quarter of veterans with schizophrenia treated with clozapine in 8 hospitals throughout VISN 1. As part of a quality of care initiative pursued throughout VA medical centers in New England, fasting blood sugar levels were obtained from veterans diagnosed with schizophrenia and treated with clozapine, an atypical anti-psychotic medication shown to be particularly effective for patients who have not responded to traditional drug therapies. The researchers suspected that clozapine treatment would be associated with abnormal blood sugar tests on the basis of an earlier study using a national VA sample of 38,000 veterans with schizophrenia. The prior research found that patients prescribed clozapine were 25% more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than those receiving traditional tranquilizers. The present study evaluated the rates of both elevated blood and diabetes in patients on clozapine who had not been previously diagnosed with diabetes. Surprisingly, 23% of these patients had high blood sugar and 6% met criteria for diabetes even though no previous diagnosis of diabetes had been made. Both high blood sugar and diabetes are associated with a range of medical problems, particularly heart disease. The research team, comprised of Michael Sernyak, M.D., Barbara Gulanski, M.D., Douglas Leslie, Ph.D. and Robert Rosenheck, M.D., point out that the underlying cause is unknown for the increased risk for high blood sugar and diabetes. Further research is needed to determine whether the risk is limited to clozapine or also seen in patients treated with other new generation, atypical antipsychotic agents like risperdone and olanzepine. In the meantime, physicians treating veterans with schizophrenia patients with clozapine and with other atypical neuroleptics should be alert to the increased risk for high blood sugar and diabetes in these patients.