

## **Caring for Those With Bipolar Disorder: Impact on Caregivers**

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers have found high rates of depression along with use of mental health and primary care services in caregivers of persons with bipolar disorder. These findings add to a growing literature showing that the burden of mental illness has repercussions that extend beyond the distress and disability experienced by the person with bipolar disorder. This study was the first to examine use of mental health and primary care services by caregivers for those with bipolar disorder, for which the hallmark symptoms are severe moodswings that include both high, manic moods and low, depressed moods. In a group of over 200 caregivers for bipolar patients, 33% reported significantly depressed mood. Service utilization rates over the previous 7 months were 30% for mental health services and 14% for primary care services. Mental health service use was over 7 times community rates while primary care services were over twice those of community rates. Self ratings of depression and feelings of burden were strongly related to use of health services. This level of caregiver burden is comparable to that reported by family members of patients diagnosed with schizophrenia and with dementia. The MIRECC research team suggests that interventions to reduce depression and burden are needed to benefit both caregivers and those with bipolar disorder. Prior studies with other patient groups have shown that high levels of family burden predict a poorer clinical course for the patient seeking treatment. The research group was led by Yale researcher, Deborah Perlick and by MIRECC researcher Robert Rosenheck.