

# **Cornell University**

## **Weill Cornell Community-Based Research Partnerships in Geriatric Mental Health**

### ***Center Description***

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The Cornell group focuses primarily on older adults whose mood disorders are severe (e.g., bipolar illness and psychotic depression) or complicated by disability, medical burden, cognitive impairment, and/or social disadvantage. The population of older adults is large, growing, and heterogeneous. Health and functional status varies systematically by age, so that the 65 year old looks very different than someone in the late 80's. And, of course, there is great variation within age groups. As people live longer, even with chronic illness or disabilities, cases of complicated and/or severe major depression become increasingly the norm. Depression poses a significant burden to older adults and their families, and present significant challenges to health care policy, service delivery, and clinical care.

Our community-based research partnerships focus on community dwelling, older adults whose growing frailty, medical burden, disabilities, and social losses put them at high risk for depression and vulnerable to its effects on independent living. Our partnership research started with NIMH funding (R24 MH53816; Meyers) with which we established an ongoing collaboration with the county's Department of Community Mental Health. Our partnership with home healthcare agencies began with a longitudinal study of a representative sample of newly admitted Medicare patients from a large agency (R01 MH56482; Bruce). Subsequent funding (R24 MH64608; Bruce) has supported infrastructure development with three regional agencies. We have collaborated with the county's Department of Senior Programs and Services (P30MH068638; Alexopoulos) for several years, including the inclusion of PHQ-9 depression assessment in the routine assessment conducted for home delivered meals clients. Other settings for community-based research include primary care, adult homes (i.e., board and care facilities), and the NYC personal care program.

We also actively contribute to stakeholder groups such as *Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York*. The Alliance was founded in 2003 and now has over 1000 members, including consumers, family members, clinicians, government officials, administrators, and researchers. The Alliance has successfully generated policy and practice changes at the county, city and state level. The Alliance recently succeeded in having its *Comprehensive Geriatric Mental Health Act* passed by the NYS Legislature and signed by Governor Pataki; one of its provisions is formation of the NYS Geriatric Mental Health Interdepartmental Planning Group. Drs. Bruce and Sirey have been active members of the Alliance from its inception by contributing to work groups, participating in focus groups, and giving formal presentations as part of the Alliance's series on Best Practices. Both served on the Mental Health Caucus for Westchester's Mini-White House Conference on Aging, and are members of the new County Geriatric Mental Health Interdepartmental Planning Group (chaired by Dr. Sirey).