



**RUTGERS**

School of Health Professions

# **Supporting Health in Older Adults Living with Psychiatric Conditions**

*Michelle Zechner, PhD, LSW, CPRP*  
*Assistant Professor*

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences

School of Health Professions

Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and

Counseling Professions

zechnemr@shp.rutgers.edu

# Challenges to Healthy Aging

- Premature morbidity & mortality
- Complex inter-connected psychiatric and health needs
- Likelihood of accelerated aging in cognitive, functioning and physiological domains(Jeste et al., 2011)
- Poorly trained workforce

*How can we support health for people living with psychiatric conditions and co-morbid health conditions?*



# Identify/test integrated models of practice

- Integrate mental health and physical health care policies & services
- Identify and test holistic models of clinical programming in mental health and aging settings (8 Dimensions of Wellness)

**Zechner, M., & Kirchner, M. P. (2013).** Balanced Life: A pilot wellness program for older adults in psychiatric hospitals. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 36(1), 42-57.

**Zechner, M., Pratt, C., Barrett, N., Dreker, M. & Santos, S. (2018).** *Multi-Dimensional Wellness Interventions for Older Adults with Serious Mental Illness: A Systematic Literature Review.* Manuscript under review.

## Increase Motivation for Physical Activity

- Older persons with psychiatric conditions are sedentary
- PA improves psych sx's, health, cognition & well-being
- Need to increase motivation & adherence

**Zechner, M.**, McDonald, M, King, T., Jahnke, R., & Monroy-Miller, C. Engaging older adults using Tai Chi at a psychiatric hospital. *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation*. In press.

**Zechner, M.** & Gill, K. (2016). Predictors of Physical Activity in Persons with Mental Illness: A Social Cognitive Model. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*. 39(4), 321-335.

Gill, K., **Zechner, M.**, Anderson, E., Swarbrick, M. & Murphy, A. (2016). Wellness for Life: A Pilot Inter-Professional Intervention to Address MetS, *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 39, 147-153.

## Prepare the Workforce

- Mental health providers have limited understanding of aging
- Providers in the aging system are challenged by people living with psychiatric conditions
- Need for specialized training

**Zechner, M. R.,** Birkmann, J. C., Sperduto, J., & Pratt, C. (2018). Sensitizing Inpatient Mental Health Staff to the Challenges of Aging. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 56(4), 12-16.

## Next Steps

- Identification and testing of effective psychosocial interventions to improve quality of life and improve health outcomes for older adults with co-morbid psychiatric & physical health chronic conditions
- Explore motivation for physical activity
- Refine educational strategies to build workforce competencies in aging and mental health across settings