*K. Chatman Writing Sample #1*

**CeMHOR (Center for Mental Health Outcomes Research) Newsletter, Fall 2006**

**Investigator brings a “listening attitude” to two geriatric studies**

Two years into a three-year Research Career Development Award from VISN-16, Dr. Dinesh Mittal is the principal investigator for two projects involving geriatric patients.

The VA CeMHOR researcher and Hartford Center scholar conducted a pilot study at the UAMS Memory Research Center on a *Deficit Compensation Enhanced Consent Procedure in Patients with Mild Alzheimer’s Disease or Mild Cognitive Impairment*. Meanwhile, Dr. Mittal not only designed but interviewed patients for a study at the VA Medical Center at Fort Roots, an *Intervention for Improving Antipsychotic Adherence in Older Veterans with Psychotic Disorders*.

Thirty-five patients were enrolled in the 2005-2006 Enhanced Consent study, funded with $15,477 from the UAMS Memory Research Center. Forty veterans participated in the Antipsychotic Adherence project. A training grant from VA’s South Central VISN-16 provided over $239,000 for the three year (2004-2007) Antipsychotic Adherence study.

The data collection phase of both projects is now complete. The studies grew out of the Dr. Mittal’s training as a research fellow at the Hartford Center for geriatric psychiatry at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) in 2005.

The Enhanced Consent project is among the first of its kind, according to Dr. Mittal. It has long been observed that the mentally ill often struggle to understand the elaborate protocols required for mental health studies. In 1998, the National Bioethics Advisory Commission recommended that “creative measures” be developed to “enable persons with decisional impairments” to understand their role and rights as research subjects.

In 2001-2002, the NIMH-funded Advanced Center for Interventions and Services Research at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) developed a computer-based, interactive disclosure information program. The UCSD study involved 102 patients aged 50 or older with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorders. Those who received disclosure information with a Power Point slide show scored higher on comprehension tests than those given only written material.

Dr. Dilip Jeste, the Principal Investigator for the UCSD study, was Dr. Mittal’s mentor at UCSD’s Hartford Center. With his mentor’s encouragement, Dr. Mittal designed a pilot study of two enhanced, educational interventions: 1) a paper-based explanation of a research project with simplified language; and 2) a Power Point slide show for patients with mild or early stage Alzheimer’s disease.

Dr. Mittal said that data from the Enhanced Consent project indicated that, “The written and Power Point interventions worked equally well to improve understanding, even after first trial, and “both interventions work even better with repetition.” The major difference between the approaches was that the Power Point presentation took less time for patients to complete.

Dr. Mittal said the IRB staff at UAMS showed interest in his study and seemed willing to approve research proposals with computer-based consent procedures.

Dr. Mittal’s second project used an enhanced intervention to improve medication adherence for older veterans with schizophrenia. These patients face “difficult issues – the geriatric issues of older people, plus cognitive defects and the impact of a long term illness,” Dr. Mittal explained.

The four-month study involved an assessment of adherence at baseline, four week and four month intervals. Veterans hospitalized with schizophrenia at Fort Roots received a three-part, nine-event intervention, beginning with three days of 20 to 60 minute interviews with a nurse or Dr. Mittal. The initial interviews were followed by three weekly face-to-face sessions, either on an outpatient basis or in the hospital. Over the next three months, participants received monthly “booster” contacts by telephone.

The interviews with patients had three components: 1) education about medications; 2) behavioral strategies to help patients access the VA health system; and 3) relationship-building between patients and providers.

One educational objective for many veterans in the study was to learn the names of their medications, said Dr. Mittal. Patients often recognized a drug by its appearance -- “the green pill” – rather than by name. If the pharmacy received a different shipment of the drug, a patient might be unable to order refills of a much needed medication.

For Dr. Mittal, the heart of the intervention was the relationship-building work, aimed at helping patients talk with their regular providers. The interviewers tried to “validate the perceptions” the veterans had about their illness and to “take a listening attitude” to their lifestyle choices. “We reinforced what they were doing right,” said Dr. Mittal, while “making gentle suggestions” about medication adherence.

In order to maintain consistency across the study, both nurse and doctor followed a written manual to conduct interviews. Both interviewers found the manual difficult to follow, Dr. Mittal said, because “some of the information was already known to the patients.”

The intervention “probably helped some” of his participants to stay on their medications. Dr. Mittal said he is in the early phrase of data analysis. His hope is to learn enough from this project to design future studies that will target interventions to those most likely to benefit from them.

Dr. Mittal concludes his first year as a Principal Investigator hoping he will soon be able to design larger studies of geriatric patients in outpatient settings. Both the Enhanced Consent and Antipsychotic Adherence projects he conducted this year have been milestones in his development as a researcher. “In both these projects I have learned that the way information is given to patients is important. Respecting the patients’ autonomy and allowing them to choose the intervention that will help them most” is not a new finding for Dr. Mittal, but it may be the most important one.

*K. Chatman Writing Sample #2*

**Internet Encyclopedia of Arkansas**

**History of the Fargo Agricultural School**

In early 20th century Arkansas, Negro\* children were seldom educated beyond the primary grades. Black\* youth faced a life of farm labor. In the 1920s and 1930s most southern Negroes were sharecroppers indebted to white landowners, to whom they gave a share of their crops for rent. To supplement the family income, women often worked as cooks, housekeepers, laundresses and nursemaids to white landowners’ children. Doctors, teachers, and clergymen headed only a few rural Negro\* households, and only 2-3% of southern blacks\* owned their own houses (Irons, 4-7).

But in 1915, educational opportunities for Negro children in Arkansas expanded when Floyd Brown, a Mississippi native and Tuskegee Institute graduate, visited Brinkley and was drawn to the area (Storey, E1). In 1919, Brown returned to Arkansas with $2.85 in his pocket and a plan to transform the educational landscape in the Delta. Brown “bought 20 acres of land on credit” in Fargo, three miles north of Brinkley, and “convinced local supporters to donate mules, lumber, and supplies and labor” to construct barns, dormitories and classrooms for the Fargo Agricultural School (ALFDC, March 1, 1994). For thirty years (1919-1949), Floyd Brown, his wife Lillie Epps Brown, and a small group of dedicated teachers made the Fargo Agricultural School (FAS), “one of the few private non-denominational schools for colored\* children ever established” in the American South (ALFDC, March 1, 1994).

\* Before the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, the terms “Negro” and “colored” were commonly used instead of “black” or “African-American” for people of color.

The Fargo curriculum reflected the philosophy of Tuskegee founder Booker T. Washington as well as the job market for southern Negroes. FAS offered a half day of academic studies—English, music, history, mathematics and natural sciences. The other half day, girls studied child care, family income management, food preparation, serving and preservation, and sewing. Othello Faison, a 1946 FAS graduate, remembers making “very pretty” rag rugs with a punch needle. “No matter how poor you are, have something pretty,” Mrs. Brown advised her home economics students (Faison Interview, Jan. 27, 2005). Fargo boys learned carpentry, electrical wiring, plumbing, and care of livestock and poultry. They built bookcases, porch swings, and wagon beds, repaired tool handles, and sharpened plows, saws, axes, and hatchets (Harlan London papers).

Strict standards of conduct were maintained in the Fargo School dormitories. Girls were housed four to a room in a dormitory with a Matron, a faculty member who reported to Mrs. Brown (Faison Interview). The Dean of Academic Instruction managed the boys’ dormitory. Dormitory supervisors were kept busy making boys and girls keep a safe distance at dances and “breaking up heated arguments over card games and love lives, water pistol fights, and all the normal emotional problems of teenagers living in a controlled environment” (Harlan London papers).

Brown and the high school choir frequently traveled the Delta to recruit students and persuade their parents of the benefits of a high school education. Geraldine Purcell Davidson, one of four sisters who attended FAS in the 1930s-1940s, said her parents “went without proper clothing” to pay Fargo’s $15 monthly room, board, and tuition fees because they “wanted something for their children that they didn’t have” (Davidson Interview, January 18, 2005). What Floyd Brown had was a palpable sense of purpose and a strong work ethic: “Floyd Brown walked so erect. He was a king-like figure—a black prince!” (Davidson Interview). The school motto, “Work Will Win,” served as the title of a 1994 video documentary about FAS and the lasting impression President Brown made on his young charges (Storey, E1).

In 1949, an ailing Floyd Brown sold the 800 acre FAS facility to the State, which had opened segregated public schools for its Negro children. The Fargo school buildings were “demolished and replaced” by a state-run women’s prison (Storey, E1). Brown died in 1961; his widow lived until 1994. The Browns were childless. Yet their legacy survives in the memories of hundreds of FAS alumni who attend reunions. Geraldine Purcell Davidson supervises a small FAS Museum, supported by alumni and located at the Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation (ALFDC) facility on the original Fargo Agricultural School grounds just north of Brinkley, AR.

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*Writing Sample #3 (for a client’s web site)*

Gold Jobs Are Greener

 As workforce developers, we have rolled with the punches for more than twenty years, implementing the order of the day to find decent jobs for urban youth. In the 1990’s, we emphasized training in pre-employment competencies. Later, we focused on high-stakes standardized testing. At the turn of the century, we were prompted to build an employer demand-driven workforce system. Now, in the mid-2010’s, green jobs are supposed to increase workforce participation.

 Don’t get me wrong. Saving the planet by creating jobs in solar technology, urban agriculture, and biofuels is a good thing. Many of my colleagues would have me hog-tied and bull-whipped for criticizing any job creation strategy that promises new opportunities for blue collar workers. I agree. Bring on the green jobs.

 My point is that we should study employment projections before we pass from one trendy idea to the next. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) cannot predict the future of green jobs, but they know all about the anticipated growth in health and human services occupations. BLS foresees a growth rate of 26% for personal care assistants from 2014 to 2024. They anticipate an increase of 11% in openings for social and human service assistants in the coming decade, compared to an average growth rate of 7% for all occupations. For our youth, these are gold jobs, the ultimate in reciprocity, where the unemployed are trained to help the unemployed, the poor are given a chance to help the poor, and the undereducated learn to educate their neighbors.

 You think I’m describing community service, right? Wrong. Gold jobs are career tracked for the disenfranchised. Personal care aides visit the elderly and disabled to provide meals, light housekeeping, conversation, and caring. Social and human service assistants are para-professionals, working with social workers and community groups to find services for families and individuals, including the immigrants, the mentally ill, the homeless, former prisoners, and people with addictions. Social and human service assistants network with local agencies to identify services, prepare paperwork and even drive clients to appointments.

 In this manner, the young people we guide through our programs today become the service providers of tomorrow. Endless studies prove that serving others builds empathy, self-mastery, and motivation. Why gold jobs? Simply put, the hard work has to be done, and who better than the youth who have lived the struggle? There are countless examples of former at-risk kids who now work for or direct human services programs. I would venture to say that their employment in the human service industry is more frequent than in any other.

 For starters, being in a program gives trainees natural connections and job information not available to others. People tend to work in places they know. Just being in a program increases the likelihood of working there. It just makes sense to find a niche in an industry with a good job outlook and programs that just helped the applicants.

After all, the real battle to transform lives takes place outside the hours of 9 to 5. When I speak to educators, I always ask, “Are you willing to miss your son’s football game or your daughter’s piano recital to meet with youth leaders at ten p.m. to organize against the local employer who refuses to hire youth within the community?” Most teachers are ready to pack up shop by three p.m. I hear clueless policymakers speak about reducing the drop-out rate and getting more youth off the streets. But they get quiet when asked where the new teachers and programs will come from.

 No one is better qualified than the youth we serve to fill these gaps. Why? Because they are already there. Any youth worker will tell you that our goal is to make sure that when youth leave our program, our program never leaves them. Let’s put these young people to work in gold jobs, uplifting their peers and serving their communities. The benefits of gold investments in our educational and workforce system could be huge. Gold job development holds the promise of:

• Improved employment prospects for the young

• Entry-level positions with upward mobility through a combination of experience, education, and on-the-job training

• Long-term benefits for underserved communities and American society as a whole

 It is our responsibility to make these jobs permanent and incorporate them into the matrix of our human service system. A gold economy brings services to those who need them most. The workers are waiting for us to empower them. Let’s give them a thumbs- up and watch what happens.