

The
many
hats



of Vanya Hamrin

VANYA HAMRIN TREATS THE WHOLE CHILD THROUGH her work as a child and adolescent clinical nurse specialist at West Haven Mental Health Center. For the past 15 years she has provided individual, family and group therapies as well as psychopharmacological management to children and adolescents. As part of that work she sees a full spectrum of psychiatric disorders—childhood depression, ADHD, learning disabilities, behavioral disorders, childhood schizophrenia and anxiety disorders. “Once we diagnose the child, we provide comprehensive psychiatric treatment and work with the parents and the child’s school system,” she explains. “We then advocate for the child’s learning and emotional needs within the school system.”

Because the Mental Health Center is funded through the Department of Children and Families, clients are not limited to a certain number of mental

health visits and therefore have comprehensive options for longer term access to clinicians. Nurse practitioners and other mental health professionals can visit the school to check in on a child she is working with. As a result of the Mental Health Center’s close working relationship with the West Haven Public School District, Vanya and her colleagues are “available for the child throughout his childhood, as he moves from elementary to middle school to high school,” explains Vanya.

“We are bridging a gap to help children—to provide them with comprehensive evaluation, diagnostic and treatment plan—to offer full support,” she says. “Because I can prescribe medications that might be needed, this can help minimize the shuffle that families may otherwise have to go through to receive mental health services.”

Vanya can also see the family mem-

bers of the child to help address issues that the whole family may be experiencing, such as parenting concerns or relationship problems. This work has helped her to develop an anger management group for adolescents as well as to coordinate parenting groups. “Services such as anger management can impact a whole family to make positive home life changes,” she says. “These in turn result in better outcomes for the child’s education and his functioning with peers at school, as well.”

Like many of the faculty at YSN, Vanya splits her time between teaching and her clinical work, and these activities inform her scholarship. She has published numerous articles contributing to greater insight into pediatric psychiatric disorders. “In my writing I have focused on treatment for childhood depression,” she explains. “I find it directly correlates with my work in West Haven because I see a lot of children who are depressed and can follow them through evidence-based therapies to secure long-term positive outcomes.”

Vanya has examined data related to the prescription of anti-depressants known as SSRI’s to children—a controversy that has arisen as a result of the Food and Drug Administration warning that came out regarding the rise in suicidal thought and agitation in children on anti-depressant medication. Her scholarship has focused on the good assessment and the best treatment interventions for



Vanya flanked by colleagues, takes part in YSN’s commencement ceremonies in May 2005.

children suffering with depression. She has also researched the effects of gunshot injuries and other traumatic events in children’s lives. In two of her published studies she has evaluated acute stress disorder in the pediatric gun shot injured population. Her findings show that children are more psychologically vulnerable to developing acute and post-traumatic stress following such incidents.”

In mentoring YSN students, Vanya continues to shape the experiences of future nurses and help expose them to clinical situations that cover the full range of adolescent and family psychiatric treatment. Typically she oversees student clinical rotations by designing a

schedule that allows each student to take part in the treatment of a variety of conditions for a period of nine months. For each student Vanya is careful to assign children of a variety of ages with differing mental health needs. “This hands-on experience helps fine-tune the students’ diagnostic skills,” she says.

YSN alumna Maryellen Pachler, who is now employed at the Yale Child Study Center, worked at the Mental Health Center under Vanya’s supervision. Through this clinical training, she was involved in diagnosing and treating psychiatric and behavioral problems of children and families. She says, “Working with an interdisciplinary team and receiving input from social work, medical and nursing perspectives helped me to develop a holistic approach. Vanya directed me with her feedback but emphasized a ‘do it yourself’ approach to managing my patient load. As a result, I felt well prepared for a busy, fast-paced clinical environment.”

While her teaching, research and clinical work are “a huge part” of who she is, these activities still do not begin to describe all of the hats that Vanya Hamrin wears. A wife and mom to her seven year old daughter, Brittany, Vanya also enjoys playing golf and traveling with her family. “So many of us at YSN balance multiple priorities,” she says. “We are passionate about our work which informs our personal lives, and our personal lives, in turn, help us to better understand and to provide better care for our patients.”



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