July 1, 2015

Dear colleagues,

We are writing to announce new leadership with the VT LEND (formerly VT-ILEHP) program. Dr. Stephen Contompasis has decided to retire from UVM, effective June 30, 2015; to pursue other opportunities. He will continue his work with the Vermont Department of Health Children with Special Health Needs, the UVM Medical Group and Vermont Special Olympics.

Dr. Maria Mercedes Avila and Dr. Jean Beatson are named VT LEND Co-Program Directors. Dr. Avila is also named VT LEND Training Director. Ms. Mary Alice Favro is now the Associate Training Director and will continue in her role as Clinical Director. VT LEND continues to receive full support from the College of Medicine and our federal project officer.

Dr. Avila joined VT LEND in 2009 and has led the programmatic changes resulting in VT LEND being nationally recognized for cultural and linguistic competence (CLC) initiatives. Dr. Avila’s work has increased awareness and enhanced systems of care for diverse families, including former refugees and immigrants, with children with NDD/ASD. She is Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, co-chair of the National Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) Multicultural Council, member of the AUCD Board of Directors and the Vermont Governor’s Children and Family Council on Prevention Programs. In these roles, Dr. Avila has supported the field of children's behavioral health through research, development and dissemination of critical information on CLC; and has provided technical assistance and training to other grantees and system of care communities around the country.
Dr. Beatson has been an integral part of VT LEND since its inception, in 1995. She is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Nursing, College of Nursing and Health Sciences. On the national level, Dr. Beatson serves on the Association of University Centers for Disability National Training Directors Council and the Maternal Child Health Bureau’s Performance Measures Workgroup promoting inclusive training programs and diversifying leadership. Statewide, she works to promote family-centered, culturally responsive service in her work as curriculum consultant for training supporting care coordinators in medical homes. Her research, scholarly writing and presentations include cultural and linguistic competence, person and family-centered care, refugee mothers raising children with disabilities, and inter-professional education. Dr. Beatson’s works have been disseminated across the state, region and nation.

We are looking forward to continuing partnerships and collaborations to strengthen the work for all children, youth and families impacted by autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities in Vermont.

Maria Mercedes Avila, Ph.D.  
Jean E. Beatson, Ed.D., R.N.  
Mary Alice Favro, MA,CCC-SLP