VHA Mental Health Services for Women Veterans

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Washington, D.C.
Office of Mental Health Services (116)
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Department of Veterans Affairs
VA’s Commitment: Quality Care

• Our nation’s commitment to a new generation of Veterans, for their lifetime:
  – Treat returning Veterans early in the course of mental health problems
  – Provide holistic, integrated care for physical and mental health problems:
    *Mental health is an essential component of overall health care*

• Being there for the lifetime of all Veterans we are serving, from all eras
Brief Recent History of MH Care in VA

• Attrition of VA MH services, late 1990s to about 2003

• Major Rebuilding & Innovation since 2004
  – VHA Comprehensive MH Strategic Plan
    • Developed in 2003-04 and approved November, 2004
    • Major rebuilding efforts for MH began with this document
  – Uniform MH Services Handbook
    • Completes implementation of Strategic Plan
    • Defines mental health services that must be provided to all enrolled Veterans
      – Delineates essential components of mental health care that are to be implemented nationally
      – To ensure that all Veterans, wherever they obtain care, have access to needed mental health services
Gender Sensitivity in the Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics Handbook

• Gender-specific issues can be important component of care

• Strongly encourage sites to give any Veteran
  • Treated for MST the option of same-sex provider, or opposite-sex provider if trauma involved a same-sex provider
  • Treated for other mental health (MH) conditions the option of a consultation from same-sex provider regarding gender-specific issues

• All VA facilities must accommodate and support women and men with safety, privacy, dignity, and respect

• All inpatient and residential care facilities must provide safe and secure sleeping and bathroom arrangements including, but not limited to, door locks and proximity to staff
Mental Health Services for Women Veterans

• Women can receive a wide range of mental health services including treatment for
  – Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  – Substance use disorder
  – Depression
  – Conditions associated with military sexual trauma (MST)
  – Psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery
  – Homelessness or At risk to become Homeless
Mental Health Services for Women Veterans

- VA offers a continuum of mental health care services which includes
  - Psychological assessment and evaluation
  - Outpatient individual and group psychotherapy
  - Residential care
  - Inpatient care
Onboard VHA Employees, end of FY09

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<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tr>
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Military Sexual Trauma

- Both men and women experience military sexual trauma
- On screening, 21% of women seen in VHA in 2009 report to their VA healthcare provider that they experienced MST
- VA provides all physical and mental health care for conditions related to MST free of charge and has created specialized outpatient and residential/inpatient programs for such care
- Veterans interested in learning more can contact the MST Coordinator at their local VA facility or speak with their existing VA healthcare provider
Treatment for Mental Health Problems That May Be Associated with MST

• VA’s Office of Mental Health Services funds several national training initiatives in evidence-based psychotherapies for PTSD, anxiety, depression, and serious mental illness

• Several of these therapies were originally developed and tested with survivors of sexual abuse and assault

• Because these conditions are commonly associated with MST, these national initiatives have been an important means of expanding MST survivors’ access to cutting-edge treatments
MST: In 2009, VA Focused On

- Veteran outreach materials and activities to ensure that Veterans know about MST-related services available to them
- Ensure every site has an MST Coordinator
- Ensure that annual reports on MST are generated and made available
- Ensuring that VA providers were knowledgeable about MST-related issues
MST: In 2010, Further Steps

- Increase information on MST on the Internet and elsewhere
- Make it easier for Veterans to connect with MST Coordinators and other individuals who can assist them in accessing free MST-related care
- Events for Sexual Assault Awareness Month (April); VA’s theme for Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2010 was “Making Connections to Help MST Survivors”
- Developing mandatory training for primary care providers and mental health providers on working with Veterans who report MST
Services for Women Veterans Who Are Homeless or At Risk for Homelessness

• VA’s Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups (CHALENG) FY 2008 Annual Report estimated
  – 131,000 Veterans were homeless on any given night
  – of that number, 5% were women

• VA's continuum of care includes homeless services for special populations, such as women and families

• Programs range from temporary and transitional housing to permanent housing with supportive services
Services for Women Veterans Who Are Homeless or At Risk for Homelessness

Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (MH RRTP)

• Provides 24-hour, 7 day per week, supervised therapeutic milieu for Veterans with mental illnesses and addictive disorders
  – FY 09: Safety and Security of Women Veterans enhancements defined and funded
  – FY 09-10: 100% site visit of all MH RRTPs to monitor implementation with specific focus on women Veterans
Services for Women Veterans Who Are Homeless or At Risk for Homelessness

VA Homeless Providers Grant & Per Diem Program (GPD)

- Funds grants to community agencies to offer transitional housing and supportive services for homeless Veterans.
  - Women have been a funding priority in GPD Notices of Funding Availability since 2007
Services for Women Veterans Who Are Homeless or At Risk for Homelessness

**HUD-VASH**

- Provides for permanent housing for homeless Veterans and their families with VA supportive services
  - Currently, 11% of Veterans who have received HUD-VASH vouchers are women.