Palliative Care Of Veterans: Distinguishing PTSD From Moral Injury and the Clinical Implications

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Objectives

- Be able to define Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Moral Injury
- Recognize manifestations of PTSD and moral injury at the end of life
- Discern difference between moral injury and PTSD
- Become familiar with approaches to life review when trauma is a part of the story
Audience
Intertwined: War & Trauma

- CIVIL WAR: Soldier’s Heart
- WWI: Shell Shock
- WWII: Neurosis or Battle Fatigue
- Korea: Operational Exhaustion
- Vietnam: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
Defining PTSD

- Exposure to traumatic event with actual or threatened death or serious injury
- Re-experience the event
- Avoid stimuli associated with event
- Increased arousal, hypervigilance
Case Example

- Mr. J is a 68 y/o Vietnam Veteran. While in the service he was physically and sexually assaulted repeatedly by a fellow soldier. He tells this to the hospice chaplain.
- As he approaches death, repeatedly checks under bed and does entire house search before bedtime.
- Has begun shouting out in the middle of the night.
- Wife is confused – he’s never been diagnosed with PTSD, he has never acted like this before, but she knew to never to be near him and wake him...
Treating PTSD in EOL of Care

- Maximize patient safety: place mattress on the ground if anxious to check under bed
- Identify PTSD triggers: if loud noises are a problem, reduce noise or move patient
- If history of POW or isolation, may need frequent visits, reassurance; may be uncomfortable with being dependent
- If lucid, visits with chaplain, social worker, etc may be helpful for life review
- Educate family: new symptoms of PTSD arise when veterans can no longer suppress flashbacks
Moral Injury

INVISIBLE INJURY
BEYOND PTSD

Written by Jeff Severson Gontzel
Illustrated by Andy Warner

Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay had been working with American war veterans for more than a decade when the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began.

By then he had already decided that a PTSD diagnosis was not enough to explain or illuminate the full effects of combat.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is triggered by a terrible event - in combat, that’s often something that has happened to you. But what about a terrible event that has happened because of you?

That’s the question Shay wanted to explore.
Moral Injury definition

Term Moral Injury was coined by Dr. Jonathon Shay.

Dr. Shay defines Moral Injury as:

“Moral Injury is present when (1) there has been a betrayal of what is morally correct; (2) by someone who holds legitimate authority; and (3) in a high-stakes situation.”
“Moral injury wounds the soul.”

-Eric Newhouse, Psychology Today
Moral Injury Definition continued....

- With moral injury events are considered morally injurious if they “transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”

- Thus, the key precondition for moral injury is an **act of transgression**, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life, and so forth.
“Moral injury makes its mark by creating a flawed sense of who you were when you were in harm’s way.”

-Thomas Gibbons-Neff
What can cause moral injury

- **Unintentional errors**—U.S. military personnel are well-trained, however unintentional errors can lead to loss of life
- **Transgressive acts of others**—transgressions by peers or leaders who betray expectations in egregious ways
- **Acts of no choice**—”Him or me”
A story of moral injury

Thomas Gibbons-Neff article
“Moral Injury Is the ‘Signature Wound’ of Today’s Veterans”
-David Wood, Journalist, NPR podcast
# Moral Injury vs. PTSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PTSD</th>
<th>Moral Injury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DSM Diagnosis</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Threatening</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described by</td>
<td>Psychological/Mental</td>
<td>Moral/Ethical/Social/Cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause/basis for</td>
<td>Real or perceived threat to life</td>
<td>Betrayal/Shame/Regret/Transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support/Public awareness</td>
<td>Medium to High</td>
<td>None to Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatments</td>
<td>Some EBP</td>
<td>Little/Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA recognition</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>None to Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Moral Injury vs. PTSD

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Moral Injury</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anomie (social instability resulting from a breakdown in values/ethics)</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-harming</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Self-handicapping behaviors”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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“If the (moral) injury is severe enough, it can be almost impossible to see yourself in the present.”

—Thomas Gibbons-Neff
Treating Moral Injury

- We have to first recognize it exists
- It is about reconciling the event that caused the injury
- Need for a moral discussion
- Who is the person’s “benevolent moral authority?"
- Group; Veteran attends group with fellow veterans
- Helping the person to see that he/she is not 100% responsible for the event
Proposed model for treating moral injury *

8 step approach:
1. Connection
2. Preparation & education
3. Modified exposure component
4. Examination & integration
5. Dialogue with a benevolent moral authority
6. Reparation & forgiveness
7. Fostering reconnection
8. Planning for the long haul

*Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy*
Treating Moral Injury

- VA is testing CBT-Educational frameworks involving: self-forgiveness and making amends

- **Narrative Exposure Therapy**
  - Expand and reconstruct the experience
  - Discuss all painful experiences
  - Become familiar with emotional response
  - Find relief from sharing story and knowing emotional response
Treating Moral Injury

- **Life Review**
  - Not about collecting facts, but about understanding the patient’s perspective of his/her life story
  - Approach with open-ended questions and wonderment
  - Reflect back comments that seem like contradictions
  - Goal: Expand the life story by incorporating new realizations that may comfort or free the patient
  - Reflect back the revised story to the patient
References

- Gibbons-Neff, T. “Why distinguishing moral injury from PTSD is important.” http://www.stripes.com/opinion/why-distinguishing-a-moral-injury-from-ptsd-is-important-1.333520
- NPR Podcast: Moral Injury is the ‘Signature Wound’ of Today’s Veterans