Toward Veteran Centered Care: Appreciating the Concept of the Veteran Identity to Improve Oncology and Palliative Care in Social Work Practice

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School of Social Work
11:30 to 12:30 Monday February 20
Presentation Plan

• Who are our Veterans
• Military and Veteran identity
• Vietnam Veterans – experiences that Veteran identity may include
• Incorporating Military History into Psychosocial Assessment
Introduction

https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp
Projected Veteran Population
21,999,000

Female Veterans: 9%
Male Veterans: 91%

NCVAS, 2015
As of 9/30/2014
Veterans by conflict
Numbers in Millions as of 9/230/2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Numbers in Millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Conflict</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacetime Only</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf Wars</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Categories are not mutually exclusive
Veteran Demographics
Source: 2010 VA NSV

- Race - Caucasian: 84%
- Married: 70%
- No dependent children: 70%
- High school or less: 31%
- Were in combat: 34%
- Saw results of combat: 34%
- Exposed to environmental hazards: 23%
Military and Veteran Identity
The “Hidden Variable”

• Military experience is the “hidden variable” in the lives of men.
 Spiro, Schnurr, & Aldwin (1997)

• A more accurate statement is:
Military experience is the hidden variable in the lives of adults.
Military Service

• An “acquired cultural experience”
• Transformative experience that can bring both positive and negative affect
• Comes about during the formative period of young adulthood
• Leaves one searching for identity, meaning, and purpose in life
Basic Training

• Initiation as warrior
• Break down the individual and reconstruct as a soldier
• Prepare for hardship, danger, and bravery needed to win a battle
• Develop stoicism
• Promote cohesion
The Transformation of Elvis
Military Culture

Daley (1999) suggests that branches of service are compared to ethnicities:

• Military bases are self sufficient communities: contain housing, places of worship, shops, recreation

• These communities have deeply established rituals, traditions, and rules of behavior

• People are addressed by their rank/job function. Keeps everyone focused on their military identity and the mission. Allows for easy transitions as tours of duty change and assignments change
Vietnam Veterans
Unique Challenges for Vietnam Veterans

- Sense of gratitude was often lacking from the Vietnamese, “mission accomplished.”
- Uncertainty and ambiguity about the goals and outcomes eroded sense of achieved purpose
- Soldiers were deployed individually; staggered tours of combat duty eroded cohesion
- Combat Veterans were a minority of those who served; What was the homecoming like for non combat Veterans?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>WWII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days in combat/year</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt welcomed</td>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who Served and Why in Vietnam

• More enlisted than were drafted
  o Draft perceived to be an unfair system targeting individuals or groups

• Reasons to enlist:
  o Family tradition “to serve”
  o Perception that better to enlist than get drafted; “they” were going to get you anyway; perceived less chance of going to VN; perceived better chance to get choice training or job
  o Other financial, social, and legal reasons
Vietnam Combat Experience

• 1 year tour
• Did not train and get deployed in companies
  • fragmented, eroded sense of camaraderie & trust

• Air travel meant being an active combatant one day and Veteran returning to an ambivalent or hostile civilian environment the next (without debriefing etc)
Service Connection

- Traumatic event occurred during military service
- Compensable mental or physical d/o diagnosed
- Credible link between the d/o and the traumatic event
- Offers external validation of their disablement, heroism, service to their country and/or tribulations while in the service
Agent Orange
Agent Orange Service Connection

- Diabetes II
- Hepatitis C
- Parkinson's disease
- Ischemic heart disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- ALS*

- Respiratory cancers
- Prostate cancer
- Sarcoma
- Hodgkin's lymphoma
- NHL
- Multiple myeloma

VA Agent Orange webpage:  http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/index.asp
Agent Orange

I was killed in Vietnam, I just haven't died yet.
Camp Lejeune

Veterans who served at least 30 days of active duty at Camp Lejeune from January 1, 1957 and December 31, 1987 and who have any of the listed diseases are entitled to compensation.

- Esophageal cancer
- Breast cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Multiple myeloma
- Renal toxicity
- Female infertility
- Scleroderma
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Lung cancer
- Bladder cancer
- Leukemia
- Myelodysplastic syndromes
- Hepatic steatosis
- Miscarriage
- Neurobehavioral effects
Vietnam Veterans

Assumptions we hold about Vietnam Veterans: a group of maladjusted or potentially maladjusted individuals
  Due to unresolved grief, survival guilt, rage, and internal feelings of betrayal

Our assumptions are just that, they come from out personal experiences not the data.
  Movies/TV
  Books
  Family and Friends
VIP Findings re: Vietnam Era

• Vietnam Veterans report greater difficulty with ADLs and IADLs than WWII and Korean Conflict Veterans
• Vietnam Veterans report the most mental health issues than than WWII and Korean Conflict Veterans
• Vietnam Veterans were twice as likely to rate their health as poor as WWII and Veterans
• 50% more Vietnam Veterans reported having service connection than WWII and Korean Conflict Veterans
Military History Assessment
Value of Military Assessment

• Goal is to identify the Veteran and evaluate the impact of his/her experience
• Deepens understanding for all clinicians about the military and Veteran experience
• Allows for “Veteran-centered” care
• Facilitates diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of Veteran specific issues
• Links Veteran to financial entitlements and specialized VA and other Veteran resources
Taking a Military History

Useful tool in bridging the silence that often surrounds the military experience
Need to establish an environment of trust and respect
Not all Veterans will want to speak with you about the details of their military experience
  Sometimes, a discussion of the experiences can reactivate deeply buried issues

Maintain a patient presence as the Veteran tells his story
  Do not dismiss what has been recounted with platitudes
  affirm positive life events
Military Health History Pocket Card: I

General Questions
Would it be ok if I talked with you about your military experience?
When and where do you/did you serve and in what branch?
What type of work did you/did you do while in the service?
Did you have any illnesses or injuries while in the service?

If your patient answers “Yes” to any of the following questions, ask:
“Can you tell me more about that?”
- Did you see combat, enemy fire, or casualties?
- Were you or a buddy wounded, injured, or hospitalized?
- Did you have a head injury with loss of consciousness, loss of memory, “seeing stars” or being temporarily disoriented?
- Did you ever become ill while you were in the service?
- Were you a prisoner of war?

Compensation & Benefits
Do you have a service-connected condition?
Would you like assistance in filing for compensation for injuries/illnesses related to your service?
Call VBA at 1-800-827-1000

Sexual Harassment, Assault, and Trauma
Would it be ok to talk about sexual harassment or trauma that you might have experienced while serving in the military?
- Have you ever experienced physical, emotional, or sexual harassment or trauma?
- Is this past experience causing you problems now?
- Would you like a referral for some help with that?
- Many people find it helpful to get some support.

Living Situation
Would it be ok to talk about your living situation?
- Where do you live and who do you live with?
- Is your housing safe?
- Are you in any danger of losing your housing?
- Do you need assistance in caring for yourself and/or dependents?
**Military History Pocket Card: II**

### Exposure Concerns

**Would it be ok if I asked about some things you may have been exposed to during your service?**

- **Chemical** (pollutants, solvents, weapons, etc.)
- **Biological** (infectious diseases, weapons)
- **Psychological** (mental or emotional abuse, moral injury)
- **Physical**
  - Blast or explosion
  - Munitions or bullet wound
  - Heat
  - Other injury

**What precautions were taken? (Avoidance, PPE, Treatment)?**

- How long was the exposure?
- How concerned are you about the exposure?
- Where were you exposed?
- When were you exposed?
- Who else may have been affected? Unit name, etc.

**Blood Borne Viruses (Hepatitis & HIV)**

- Have you ever injected or snorted drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, or methamphetamine?
- Have you ever been screened for Hepatitis C or HIV?
- Would you like to be screened for these?

### Post Traumatic Stress/Symptoms

**Would it be ok to talk about stress?**

In your life, have you ever had an experience so horrific, frightening, or upsetting that, in the past month you...

- Have had nightmares about it or thought about it when you did not want to?
- Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of it?
- Were constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?
- Felt numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings?

### Military Environmental Exposures (Any Era)

- Burn Pit Smoke
- Cold Injuries
- Contaminated Water
- Chemical or Biological Agents
- Radiation (Ionizing & Non-Ionizing)
- Endemic Diseases
- Heat Stroke/Exhaustion
- Occupational Hazards: Asbestos, Industrial Solvents, Lead, Radiation

### Gulf War, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) & Operation New Dawn (OND)

- Animal Bites/Robbies
- Burn Injuries (Electrical)
- Burn Injuries (Blunt Injuries)
- Burn Injuries (Chemical or Biological Agents)
- Chemical or Biological Agents
- Chemical Burns
- Combined Penetrating Injuries
- Depleted Uranium (DU)
- Dermatologic Issues
- Embedded Fragments
- Eye Injuries
- Vision Loss

### Vietnam, Korean DMZ & Thailand

- Agent Orange Exposure
- Cold Injuries
- Hepatitis C

### Cold War

- Chemical Warfare Agent Experiments
- Cold Injuries
- Nuclear Weapons Testing or Cleanup

### WWI & Korean War

- Biological Warfare Agents
- Cold Injuries
- Nuclear Weapons Testing or Cleanup

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**Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)**

Tell your patient about VA’s Gateway to Veteran Health Benefits and Services

Find out more about military exposures

www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/
Military Health History Pocket Card: I

Step 1

“Help me understand my medical condition.”

“I had some unique experiences while serving our country, many that civilians would never have. Some of those experiences may be affecting my health, and that is why I am here at VA.”

“Help me understand my medical condition, and please be patient with me. Some of my memories may be painful or difficult to discuss.”

Military Health History
POCKET CARD FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONS TRAINEES & CLINICIANS

General Questions

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Living Situation

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Help me understand my medical condition.

“Help me understand my medical condition, and please be patient with me. Some of my memories may be painful or difficult to discuss.”
Military Health History Pocket Card: I

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Living Situation

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Military Health History Pocket Card: I

Step 5

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Do you need assistance in caring for yourself and/or dependents?
Military History Pocket Card: II

Ask all military service members and all Veterans

Exposure Concerns

Would it be ok if I asked about some things you may have been exposed to during your service?

What... were you exposed to?

- Chemical (pollution, solvents, weapons, etc.)
- Biological (infectious diseases, weapons)
- Psychological (mental or emotional abuse, moral injury)
- Physical
  - Blast or explosion
  - Radiation
  - Munitions or bullet wound
  - Fatigue
  - Vehicular crash
  - Noise/Vibration
  - Other injury

What... precautions were taken? (Avoidance, PPE, Treatment)

How... long was the exposure?

Where... were you exposed?

When... were you exposed?

Who... else may have been affected? Uniform, etc.

Blood Borne Viruses (Hepatitis & HIV)

- Have you ever injected or snorted drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, or methamphetamines?
- Have you ever been screened for Hepatitis C or HIV?
- Would you like to be screened for these?

Post Traumatic Stress/Symptoms

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Tell your patient about VA's www.myhealth.va.gov Gateway to Veteran Health Benefits and Services

Common Service-Related Exposure Concerns

Military Environmental Exposures (Any Era)

- Burn Pit Smoke
- Cold Injuries
- Contaminated Water
- Chemical or Biological Agents
- Combined Penetrating Injuries
- Depleted Uranium (DU)
- Embedded Fragments (shrapnel)

Gulf War, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) & Operation New Dawn (OND)

- Animal Bites/Robies
- Burn Trauma
- Burn Injuries (Blunt Injuries)
- Chemical or Biological Agents
- Chemical Munitions Demolition
- Combined Penetrating Injuries
- Depleted Uranium (DU)
- Dermatologic Issues
- Endemic Diseases

Infectious Diseases

- Malaria Prevention: Mefloquine – Larium
- Typhoid, Cholera, Hepatitis A, Meningitis, Whooping Cough, Polio, Tetanus

Vietnam, Korean DMZ & Thailand

- Agent Orange Exposure
- Cold Injuries
- Hepatitis C

Cold War

- Chemical Warfare Agent Experiments
- Nuclear Weapons Testing or Cleanup

WWII & Korean War

- Chemical Warfare Agent Experiments
- Nuclear Weapons Testing or Cleanup
- Cold Injuries
- Biological Warfare Agents

Find out more about military exposures www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/

Step 6
Comparing Combat and Non Combat Veterans

- In an explanatory, cross sectional study using quantitative and qualitative methods 81 Vietnam Era Veterans (47 NC, 34 C) with terminal cancer were surveyed to determine their quality of life at the end of life.

- Findings: No difference in qol, levels of social support, race, spirituality, expressions of end of life choices, and types of cancer. Positive relationship between qol and those with the most combat histories.
Combat & Non Combat Veterans

• CV are more likely to state they rely on their military experience to help them cope
• CV are more likely to cite family as primary source of social support
• CV cite military experience [combat] as a source of ongoing distress
• CV cite Agent Orange as the reason for their terminal illness
• NC are more expressive about illness progression
• NC are more expressive of poor family support
• 55% of the sample indicated no relation between their military experience and their current state of illness
Quotes from the Study

• In what ways, if any, do you feel that your combat experience or military experience affects your current state of illness?
  o CV: It gave me the experience, skills and knowledge to participate in my own disease and it made me less fearful of my current medical situation. It also made me far more compassionate in everything I do.
  o NC: The military experience is helping me cope better. I told [my family] the other day that I got through paratrooper training. I was determined to get my jump wings. There wasn’t any SOB who was going to stop me. That experience helped me with my stress and the long hours of chemo and radiation.
  o NC: I worked in an Army hospital and I saw all kinds of injured people. I saw what war can do.
How taking a Military History can Improve Palliative Care

To identify Veteran patients and the Veterans’ cohorts

The information gathered is included with other assessment results that guide the social work practice in palliative care

A way to identify areas of resiliency and growth at the end of life among the Veterans in a palliative care social worker’s caseload
Projected Veteran Deaths

Projected Veteran Deaths for Selected Periods of Service: 2000 to 2036

Note: Veterans who served in multiple periods are shown in the most recent period in which they served.

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Actuary, Veteran Population Projections Model (VetPop), 2007, Table 8D.
Selected Resources

- Military History Pocket Card: https://www.va.gov/oaa/pocketcard/overview.asp
- Agent Orange Information: http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/
- EPEC for Veterans: http://www.wehonorveterans.org/epec-veterans-curriculum
- We Honor Veterans: http://www.wehonorveterans.org
Thank you

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