When someone is wounded or ill, seeking help is typically an obvious solution. However, there are wounds and illnesses that often go untreated because they are not physically obvious. These are things which affect emotions, psychological or social well-being, known as Mental Health or Behavioral Health. In the U.S. one in six adults live with a mental health illness which has many conditions and ranges from moderate to severe. Reports have also shown that nationally, the rates of suicide have steadily increased since 1999.

When it comes to the nation’s Veterans, the numbers are staggering. A study conducted by the VA showed that in one year, an average of 20 Veterans die by suicide per day and only six of those were accessing the Veterans Health Affairs.

Because of this, VA leadership made suicide prevention a top priority, opening Mental Health care to all Veterans, whether they are enrolled within the VHA system or not.

Today, there are many doors Veterans can walk through to access Behavioral Health Care and treatment. According to Monica Veney, Licensed Clinical Social Worker and the lead for the Hampton VA Medical Center’s Suicide Prevention Program, the Vet Crisis Line is the best and most immediate way to get care in the moment when a Veteran is in crisis. Thanks to modern technology Veterans can call or text the crisis line as well as utilize a “chat” option.

“We feel connection is what helps people to get better; connection is the medicine people often need.”

The Hampton VA is well equipped to address diverse mental health illnesses and sees approximately 18,000 Veterans in their Behavioral Health Center annually. This past April, Hampton opened a new two-story, 25,000 square foot facility to support the growing population.

Continued on next Page
One of the common issues seen within the Veteran population is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). "Unfortunately, one of the struggles we have is getting people in early when coming off active duty," said Dr. Kristie Norwood, a Hampton VAMC Psychologist and lead for the PCT program.

"I think a lot of that is because of avoidance or Veterans thinking 'I am going to go and live my life and pretend this doesn’t exist’ and so many times, once we see them their symptoms have moved towards a chronic phase. This can often mean a more difficult recovery process."

But recovery is what the VA strives for, said Dr. Peter Johnson, Psychologist and the coordinator for the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) who works with Veterans who suffer from severe mental illness such as severe psychosis, mania, bi-polar disorder and schizophrenia.

"The real difference between the recovery model versus the old model is we know recovery is possible for all Veterans," said Johnson. "Just because you have a diagnosis doesn't mean you can’t go back to work or school or have meaningful relationships."

Johnson said when he began with the VA the idea of recovery sounded good. Now he has been involved with the program long enough to see plenty of evidence and knows recovery is a reality.

"I have countless examples of those who have made great achievements. Once you see it and you know it is possible, it helps you to break down those internalized stigmatizing messages Vets may have," said Johnson.

"For example, ‘my doctor told me I have schizophrenia and not to worry about work, just worry about taking my medicine’ or ‘you can’t go out into society because you are a danger;’ We work hard on changing those beliefs and mindsets."

Unfortunately, mental illness is broadly misunderstood by much of society which creates stigma’s that lead to fear and discrimination. For Veterans, that stigma can often begin when they are on active duty. Although they may want to seek help or feel the need to, they often do not because of concern for how it may affect their career.

"In PCT we spend time talking about risk and the pros and cons of seeking services," said Norwood.

"Many Vets will ask how it will affect them and we are candid with them. For example, I worked with someone who made the choice to be hospitalized and as a result they are not able to do certain aspects of their job within the community because of the services they needed."

But seeking treatment isn’t an...
Most people have some stress-related symptoms after a trauma. If those symptoms don’t fade after a month, it might be posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD treatment can help

WHAT IS PTSD?
Most people have some stress-related symptoms after a trauma. If those symptoms don’t fade after a month, it might be posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

TREATMENT CAN HELP

Find PTSD treatment

Are you in crisis? Call 911
Call 911 or 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Veteran Help: Each VA Medical Center and many VA clinics treat PTSD.

The Sidran Institute
Mental Health Service Locator (SAMHSA)
Veteran Help: Each VA Medical Center and many VA clinics treat PTSD.

(410) 825-8888
(800) 662-4357
(877) 222-8387
or www.va.gov

Updated February 2014

WWW.PTSD.VA.GOV

Continued from Page 2

end to a career or any other part of life Norwood explained. Because the VA uses a recovery model, other programs and resources are integrated into the mental health programs to include things like peer support, employment and housing assistance, to name a few, depending upon the program the Vet is enrolled in.

“We see our program (PRRC) as a launching point versus a place where someone will come for treatment for the rest of their lives,” said Johnson.

For those with severe mental illness, Johnson likens the PRRC program to an airport. “If you are headed somewhere, your destination won’t be the airport – it simply serves to get you to where you have chosen to go,” said Johnson.

“We don’t tell Vets where they are going, they tell us and we help them get there. We don’t tell them what they should be doing, we give them the tools and skills they need to get them where they want to go in life.”

To strengthen support and understanding across the mental health spectrum the VA also provides opportunities to educate families, providers and the community.

“We try integrating the family, whatever that looks like for the Vet, because we recognize it isn’t just the Vet that is going through the experience,” said Norwood.

Norwood said a strong support system enables a Vet to reach recovery. Friends and family’s words and actions can have a significant impact on the person dealing with a mental illness. For example, ensuring first person language is used when speaking to those with a mental health illness, said Johnson.

“When we use language like ‘that Vet is bipolar’ we

Continued on next Page

STORIES

George is a Vietnam Veteran. While serving as a medic, he was unable to save an injured boy. The child died in his arms. Back home, he never held his own kids because he couldn’t stand being reminded of his trauma. But with the birth of his first grandchild, he decided to get treatment. His therapy was a success. “I love holding my grandson. And you know what? I couldn’t hold my kids when they were children, but I’m holding them now.”

Maria used to enjoy spending time with friends, but after she was mugged, she couldn’t even go out. When she did go, she was so anxious that she couldn’t enjoy herself. After treatment, things changed. Now, she can dine out or even spend a day at a crowded amusement park. “I still have things that bug me,” she says, “but my life has improved so much that the things that bother me hardly matter.”
dehumanize them and some feel unheard, like their beliefs, opinions or viewpoints are disregarded because they are labeled as a mental disorder versus someone who has a mental disorder,” said Johnson.

“Community is important to everyone,” said Veney. “We want our vets to live and be connected to their communities. We feel connection is what helps people get better; connection is the medicine people often need.”

That connection can often be the difference between life and death. The Suicide Prevention Team spends a great deal of time within the community attending events not only to educate the public but to reach out to a Veteran who may be in crisis. The team is mandated to attend at least five events per month and they can be found at MMA fights, car races, and community health fairs to name a few.

VA staff are also trained within the hospital on how to deal with Veterans in crisis as well as how to document and alert the mental health team if a Veteran has attempted suicide. “The greatest benefit to this is that it enhances the Veterans care,” said Veney.

“We are also being trained on how to connect with and train local law enforcement and first responders on how to interface with Vets in crisis so instead of automatically taking them to jail – helping them understand the signs of a mental health need and taking them to get help at a local VA or hospital for treatment.”

For Veterans leaving active duty the VA has a Transition Case Management program which liaisons with active duty service ports to help meet and ease the members transition. Case managers, who are typically social workers or nurses, help connect the member with what they need whether it is mental health or primary care, benefits or housing assistance.

The VA has many doors leading to Mental Health Care. For those unsure which to walk through, sometimes it’s best just to walk through the Behavioral Health Facility’s front door which leads to what is known as Mental Health Connect.

“For those who know they need mental health help they just walk through our door, go up to the front desk and can be seen the same day,” said Norwood.

“We work to ensure we have access because we know there is stigma, we know that timing is everything, and we know coordination across platforms is pivotal.”

###

**IMPORTANCE OF VETERANS CRISIS LINE**

- **3 million** calls
- **363,000** chats
- **81,000** texts
- **478,000** referrals

**Nearly 78,000 dispatches of emergency services**

as of September 2017
What do the words “mental health” mean to you? For some, these words bring to mind symptoms and conditions — struggles with anxiety, insomnia, anger, isolation, depression.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. Mental health can also mean reconnecting with a son or daughter, realizing you don’t need alcohol and moving on, regaining confidence and going back to school, acing an interview and landing your dream job. Every day, Veterans prove that mental health means building a stronger you.

This May, in observance of Mental Health Month, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will highlight those life-changing outcomes and the possibilities that stem from mental health treatment. Whether you’re a Veteran sharing your story, a family member providing support, or a friend lending a hand, focusing on these positive outcomes can be a powerful way to provide encouragement and shape how Veterans think about treatment when they’re facing mental health challenges.

Visit MakeTheConnection.net/mhm to learn more about these real-life possibilities, and what mental health means to countless Veterans across the country.

Female Veterans and Mental Health

Did you know that 75 percent of women Veterans have served during times of conflict? VA is committed to improving their health and well-being, which includes addressing suicidal behaviors.

Women have played a significant role in our Nation’s military since its inception, but it was not until the Army Nurse Corps was created in 1901 that women formally became a part of the U.S. armed forces. The opportunity for women to serve in the military increased significantly with the end of the draft and the transition to an all-volunteer force in 1973. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women Veterans under age 45 are more likely to have served during wartime than their older counterparts. Compared to other age groups, women Veterans under age 40 experience a higher suicide rate.

Suicide prevention is VA’s top clinical priority. By conducting research into risk and protective factors for suicide, including research specific to women, VA is able to proactively identify and care for Veterans in crisis. VA is addressing the rising rates of suicide among women Veterans through:

(1) Outpatient mental health services. VA provides a full spectrum of mental health services to
There’s a virus spreading across America.

It harms the 1 in 5 Americans affected by mental health conditions. It shames them into silence. It prevents them from seeking help. And in some cases, it takes lives.

What virus are we talking about?

It’s stigma. Stigma against people with mental health conditions. But there’s good news. Stigma is 100% curable. Compassion, empathy and understanding are the antidote.

Your voice can spread the cure.

Join NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Together we can #CureStigma

Get tested at CureStigma.org
Continued from Page 5

women Veterans through VA medical centers, Vet Centers, community-based outreach clinics, and partnerships with care providers across the country.

(2) Inpatient programs. Many of VA's residential and inpatient programs either provide treatment to women only or have separate tracks for women and men.

(3) Specialty treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Evidence-based therapies for PTSD, including prolonged exposure or cognitive processing therapy, have been shown to decrease suicidal ideation. These treatments are available at every VA medical center.

(4) Treatment for the effects of military sexual trauma. VA is committed to ensuring that appropriate services are available to meet the treatment needs of all Veterans, male and female, who have experienced military sexual trauma.

It is important for mental health professionals to familiarize with the latest data specific to women Veterans and other subpopulations to effectively treat all Veterans, regardless of their race, gender, or age. VA continues to conduct research to identify risk factors for Veteran suicide, including factors that may be statistically associated with gender.

To learn more about VA's mental health services and resources for women Veterans, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, support is available 24/7. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available to all at 1-800-273-8255. Veterans, Service members, and their families and friends can call the Veterans and Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to 838255.

The Hampton VA Medical Center MST Coordinator is Debra W. Brown, Psy.D., (757) 722-9961, ext. 2724. Learn more by clicking Link.

Stay Connected

What is VEText?
An automated, interactive text message system to remind Veterans of upcoming VA appointments. Veterans can respond to confirm or cancel an appointment.

Why is VA introducing VEText?
For one reason or another, Veterans miss more than 9 million health care appointments each year. Sometimes it is hard to keep track of the times or it may be difficult to cancel appointments. This program will send timely text alerts. Veterans can confirm or cancel the date and time with a simple text back. VA will then offer any newly opened appointment times to other Veterans.

What does VEText do?
• Reminds Veterans of appointments.
• Allows Veterans a useful cancellation option if desired.
• Allows a download of the reminder to a calendar file.

When will VEText start?
The program began late March.

What do Veterans need to do to get started with VEText? What can they expect?

Update or provide an active cell phone number to VA staff.

No need to opt-in; text reminders will occur automatically.

Veterans may STOP the texts by following the instructions within the texts.

No cell phone? No problem. VEText does not replace other reminders. It simply improves the experience.

VEText does not show personal information—just a simple reminder of an appointment and offers tools to manage the appointment.

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The quality of the food you eat can impact your overall physical and mental health. Eating nutritious foods can go a long way toward achieving a healthy lifestyle, so make every bite count.

Unhealthy diets lead to major health problems like diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and cancer. Because of this, poor diet is the main cause of early death in developed countries. Nearly 20% of all deaths worldwide can be linked to unhealthy eating habits.\(^1\)

At the same time, mental illnesses are the biggest cause of disability and illness in the world. Depression alone is one of the top five leading causes of disability across the planet.\(^2\)

A healthy diet includes a full range of vegetables, fruits, legumes (lentils, chickpeas, beans), fish, whole grains (rice, quinoa, oats, breads, etc.), nuts, avocados and olive oil to support a healthy brain. Sweet and fatty foods should be special treats, not the staples of your diet.

People who eat a diet high in whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, legumes, fish and unsaturated fats (like olive oil) are up to 35% less likely to develop depression than people who eat less of these foods.\(^3,4\)

Highly processed, fried and sugary foods have little nutritional value and should be avoided. Research shows that a diet that regularly includes these kinds of foods can increase the risk of developing depression by as much as 60%.\(^5,6\)

Good nutrition starts in the womb. The children of women who eat diets high in processed, fried and sugary foods during pregnancy have more emotional problems in childhood. Similarly, diets low in whole, nutrient-dense foods and diets higher in junk and processed foods during the first years of life are linked to more emotional problems in children.\(^7,8\)

Studies have found that young people with the healthiest diets are about \textit{half as likely} to have depression. \textbf{VS} Those with the diet highest in junk and processed foods are \textit{80% more likely} to have depression.\(^9,10\)
Can’t Make It?

Let Another Veteran Take It!

To cancel your appointment:

- Call: 757-722-9961
- Log on: www.myhealth.va.gov

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Why is it So Important to Cancel My Appointment?

No-Shows actually hurt other patients. It may seem like it is impossible to get an appointment. Research shows, that in fact, appointments typically are available.

So what seems to be the Problem? According to VA studies, some 9 million patients miss their appointments annually. They simply don’t show up. In turn, patients who need to see their provider can not.

When a Veteran calls and cancels their appointment, they in turn open up a spot for another Veteran.

Just like Veterans who are frustrated when there seems to be no access, staff get frustrated as well because no-shows can easily be turned into filled spots by a simple phone call -- and now Vets can cancel via text.

The best time to cancel an appointment is at least four hours before a Primary Care appointment and 24-hours before a Specialty Care appointment.

The VHA has three convenient ways to cancel: (1) Online through MyHealtheVet (2) Via Telephone call to the call center and (3) now through VETText.

The new VETText option will automatically send reminders to patients about their appointment as long as they have an updated cell phone number with the VA.

Please remember, an appointment missed by you, is an appointment missed by two!
After adjusting for differences in age and sex, risk for suicide was 22 percent higher among Veterans when compared to U.S. non-Veteran adults.

After adjusting for differences in age, risk for suicide was 19 percent higher among male Veterans when compared to U.S. non-Veteran adult men.

After adjusting for differences in age, risk for suicide was 2.5 times higher among female Veterans when compared to U.S. non-Veteran adult women.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
Veteran Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 Press 1
text: 838255
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: Jewish-American Heritage Month, Asian-Pacific Heritage Month

MAY: Around the Campus

May 9 Patient County Fair 12 p.m. Several Vendors will be available. Front lawn of Bldgs. 110/135 (across from the water)

May 9 Veteran Baby Shower/RSVP required Babies Make the World Go ‘Round, 4-7 p.m. Hampton Campus, Bldg 83. RSVP to 757-722-9961 ext. 2398

May 16 VA2K Walk and Roll Event Hampton Campus. Hampton employees will walk a 2K and support homeless Veterans. POC. Dr. Jennifer Daly.

May 16 Veteran Town Hall/Health Fair Elizabeth City 3:30-4:30 p.m. at 1433 N. Road Street, Elizabeth City, NC 27909

May 28 Memorial Day Wreath Laying 10-11 a.m. Cemetery Rd. at Marshall Ave.

SAVE THE DATE Informational Town Hall

Sessions. Representatives will be available to answer questions. You can pre-submit questions to: VHAHAMPublicAffairs@va.gov

August 23 Chesapeake 4 to 5 p.m. at 4060 South Military Highway Chesapeake, VA 23321

November 7 Hampton 4-5 p.m. at 122 East Melon St Hampton VA

Patient Orientation: 1st Thursday of each month YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE A NEW PATIENT - ALL PATIENTS WELCOME! Attend a brief session to learn about VA healthcare and resources available Staff will be available to answer questions. Call to register! 757.722.9961 Press 2 for appointment then 2 for Primary Care. Tell the operator you want to enroll. Walk-ins welcome (upcoming dates: June 7 * July 5 * Aug. 2 * Sept. 6 * Oct. 4 * Nov. 1 * Dec. 6)

VENDOR INFORMATION FOR FOOD TRUCKS Vendors interested in bringing their trucks to the Medical Center must contact: Cassandra Ayala of Eat the Streets 757 at 757-408-2245.

Tired of WAITING at the Pharmacy? There are THREE better options: Refills should be done -- 1. via internet, 2. telephone (757-726-6005) or 3. mail: (remove the refill request slip attached to prescription paperwork, mail to the Pharmacy or put in drop off box at Pharmacy).

NOTE: Please request refills 2 to 3 weeks early. Early requests are placed in suspense and will only be released for mail when the refill is due.

Veterans, Have you? Joined our Facebook Page, get fast facts, information on benefits and upcoming events

Hampton VAMC Employees, Have you? Checked out our intranet page for information on events, celebrations and more?

The Hampton Focus is a monthly publication. Articles and information should be submitted no later than the 10th of each month. Please contact the Public Affairs Office at VHAHAMPublicAffairs@va.gov

Next month's focus: Patient Safety. Ask Me 3, LGBT

Need help recording your exercise goals, download the MOVE! Coach app today!