Suicide Prevention for Operation Enduring and Iraq Freedom Veterans

Linda Casale, RN-BC, PMHN
Session Disclaimer Statement:

I do not have any affiliation with the research, work, or products that I will be speaking about.
Definition of Suicide attempt:

- A behavior that an individual has undertaken with intent to lead to his or her own death (DSM-5 Classification, 2013).
Suicide attempt impacting medical consequences:

- Lack of knowledge about the lethality of the method chosen
- Past planning or chance intervention by others after the behavior
- High lethality attempts that require medical hospitalization beyond a visit to an emergency room
In 2007, the Veterans Administration (VA) established the Mental Health Initiative as a mechanism for funding clinical services for mental health enhancements.
This implementation lead to:

- The approval of the Uniform Mental Health Services
- Clinics that specifically meet the requirements that must be available to all Veterans with mental health conditions
Requirements of suicide prevention programs:

- Access to high quality mental health services
- Public awareness and education promoting engagement for those who need assistance
- Specific services addressing the needs of those at high risk by the addition of a centrally located Veterans call center
Suicide Screening includes the following:

- Screening all Veterans for mental health conditions at least annually
- Two centers for research, education, and clinical innovation
- Extensive evaluation of the activities within the office of suicide prevention and the mental health programs
Military culture contributing to suicidal behaviors:

- Aggressive nature of the Army
- Military lifestyle demands
- Knowledge of firearms
- Lack of social support
- Documented life events which include:
  - a desire to change military position
  - anger at the commanding officer
  - conflict in romantic relationships
Transitioning to civilian life risk factors:

- Homelessness
- Social exclusion
- Alcohol misuse
- Unemployment
- Poor mental health
Suicide is a very complex individual behavior:

The biological risk factors include:
- low cerebrospinal fluid
- hypothalamic – pituitary dysfunction
- Low blood cholesterol levels
Veterans at high risk for suicide include:

- Depressive Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Alcohol
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Substance use Disorder
Psychological factors increasing suicide include:

- Feelings of not belonging
- Perceived burdensomeness
- The acquired pain associated with suicide
- Ability to endure increased pain
Facilitating the recovery model services

Expanding the treatment for substance abuse and mental disorders

Increasing the availability of services to returning Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Integrating primary health care services
Six Performance areas of Monitoring:

- Population coverage access
- Quality of inpatient care
- Quality of outpatient care
- Economic performance
- Consumer satisfaction
- Functional outcomes
The following areas reflected improvement:

- Population coverage/access
- Outpatient care
- Economic performance
- Global functioning
Conclusions:

The results reflect improvement in the delivery of Veterans Administration mental health services and should encourage future policy efforts to sustain these gains.
