

Women Wear Combat Boots Too... Meeting the Unique Health Care Needs of Women Veterans in Civilian Practice

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Purpose

- This project will assess the knowledge gaps of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) in regards to women veteran health issues in civilian clinical practice.
- Data gained will be used to promote early identification of women veterans in civilian clinical practice where upwards of 75% of veterans receive their care
- The significance is addressing the knowledge gap of civilian providers regarding military service related risk factors and co-morbidities.
- Stimulate the need for military and veteran centric education and training in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs as well as continuing education program for licensure and certification requirements.

Significance

- The mission of the VA is to provide veteran centric healthcare to service members, and VA providers are educated and trained to meet these unique healthcare needs.
- However, approximately 8 million of the 22 million veterans receive care in VA centers leaving 75% percent of veterans seeking care in the civilian sector where there is no mechanism in place to identify veterans nor to prompt providers to ask about service connected risk factors.
- Many of the 75% are women veterans who often do not consider themselves veterans, are unaware of the services the VA has to offer, and therefore seek healthcare in the civilian sector where a history of prior military service may not be known to healthcare providers.
- Most women veterans do not readily disclose their military history or the traumatic experiences they may have encountered during their military service.
- **Civilian providers may also be at a disadvantage due to the lack of knowledge regarding the culture of the military and the impact that military service can have on its members and their families.**
- This vital information could be important for providers to know in order to adequately screen, diagnose, treat, and refer patients.



Background

- According to the Department of Defense (DoD), women comprised 14.6%, 19.5%, and 15.5% of the active duty, reserve, and National Guard forces, respectively, in fiscal year 2011.
- Approximately 220,000 women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND).
- Women are now eligible to perform duties in more than 90% of all military career fields.
- Much like their male counterparts, many of our women veterans are returning with the visible and invisible wounds of this conflict.
- While women veterans experience many of the same military service related stressors as male veterans, their physical and psychological health co-morbidities are uniquely different than their male counterparts.

Acknowledgements



It is imperative that APRNs understand the need to screen every patient, especially female patients, for a history of military service as well as receive education and training regarding the unique healthcare needs of women veterans; their risk of trauma, subsequent PTSD and other psychological co-morbidities; identification of physical co-morbidities secondary to military service; and have access to evidence-based clinical practice in the civilian sector where most women veterans receive care.

Initiatives

- Appraise the literature for current state of the science and identification of gaps in military cultural competency of civilian providers caring for women veterans in clinical practice.
- Assess provider knowledge and comfort level regarding women veteran specific health care issues and provision of care in civilian primary care practices.
- Stimulate the need for military and veteran centric education and training for providers through incorporation of veteran centric health care education in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs as well as continuing education program for licensure and certification requirements.
- Provide data to serve as an impetus behind a national conversation surrounding the inclusion of a unique identifier and assessment/screening protocol in the electronic medical record for all veterans to increase identification of veterans in civilian health care primary care practices in order to improve healthcare outcomes.

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