



THE CLERGY CONNECTION

MAY 2013

Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does. ~ William James

Newsletter of the National VA Chaplain Center **Rural Clergy Training Program**

New Research: Religious and Spiritual Factors in Depression

This study reviewed the research literature between 1964-2010 on the relationship between Religious/Spiritual beliefs and practices (R/S) and depression (Dep) in a non-military population. It is included here as a foundation for further review with military populations in future newsletters. R/S was usually measured by a self-report of the importance of R/S to an individual's life. Of the 444 articles reviewed, 67% found that people with a high level of R/S tended to have lower levels of Dep. Most studies also found that those with a high level of R/S but who were depressed showed faster recovery from Dep. These findings suggest that strengthening R/S beliefs and practices may protect those in your congregation against Dep. However, there was an important exception. Individuals with high levels of R/S who were having marital or family problems tended to show higher levels of Dep. This finding is important since both Dep and family problems are positively related to completed suicides. This relationship will be explored in more detail in a future newsletter.

Want more information? See the source: *Depression Research and Treatment, 2012* at <http://www.hindawi.com/journals/drt/2012/962860>. ☞

How to Make a Referral to the VA

If you want to make a referral for a Veteran, Reserve or Guard member, please remember to ask the permission of the warrior before contacting us as a matter of respect. To make a referral or to gain additional information, telephone the Chaplain Service at the VA Medical Center nearest to your location: http://www.va.gov/CHAPLAIN/docs/NatChapDir_3_15_13CityState.pdf. *Direct phone numbers were provided to workshop attendees on a magnet and in a more detailed paper handout.* ☞



Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**
Confidential help for Veterans and their Families.

Your Story Matters

Results from our 2010 after-training surveys showed very high ratings for our training events. There was, however, one weak point. Many community clergy remained unsure how to make an effective referral for mental health services for Veterans or military personnel in need. While 87.6%-99.5% of workshop participants rated most components of the workshop very positively, only 80.5% rated the item related to referrals very positively. After careful study and planning, our staff designed and implemented a simplified mechanism for making referrals, one that involved initial clergy-to-clergy contact. Results from 2012 after-training surveys indicated a rating of 96.6%, showing the greatest improvement among rated components of the training.

In 2012, a new addition to our programming was providing information for referring Veterans and military personnel to local community mental health staff. Survey results indicated less effective training in this area than that for training about referrals to the VA. Improving training on referrals to community mental health will be a focus of 2013 workshops. ☞

The Clergy Connection is a publication of the Office of Rural Health (ORH) and National VA Chaplain Center "Rural Clergy Training Program." For more information, contact: Jim Goalder, jim.goalder@gmail.com.



The Clergy Connection

A Soldier's Story for Reflection

The Helicopter Gunner

"There was a patrol out with a force of our tanks and they were getting hit. So we responded with a heavy fire team, three helicopter gunships. The first run we made, I saw two people in black uniforms squatting beside a tank. They went down. I'm pretty sure I killed them but, today, I'm not sure whether they were Americans. It was chaos. Sometimes I dream it's me. It puts me in the place of them. Sometimes I dream it's me in the helicopter and my brothers or mamma or daddy are on the ground and I'm killing them. I wake up sometimes and it looks like it really happened. There's a real bad guilt feeling and remorse."

- Guilt about killing friends can go very deep and be resistant to healing. It can be especially difficult when details of the event are uncertain as in this case.
- In dreams, this man's mind has substituted his family for those he killed. Such dreams are not uncommon and can be especially painful and damaging in current relationships with those we love. When faced with a man or woman with such dreams, what might be your best course of action to help?
- What could you, as a member of the local clergy, do to help this person? ☹



Not on the Rural Clergy Training Program mailing list? Join us!

Would you like to automatically receive **The Clergy Connection** newsletter email and other information from the Rural Clergy Training Program? Sign up today at www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining/subscribe! ☹

Practical Pastoral Tips: Spiritual Responses to Trauma

Picture a combat Veteran sitting across from you in your office. She is distressed. You want to help, but what issues might you expect? Listening and learning from the Veteran is a foundation for care. It's also helpful to know that there are certain spiritual issues common with combat Veterans.

- Confusion about God or grief/loss of relationship with God
- Confusion over holiness and justice as they apply to physical and moral evil
- Loss of community - unhealthy desire for independence
- Changed sense of meaning in or of life
- Loss of previously sustained and sustaining beliefs
- Confusion about core ethical beliefs and morality or powerful feelings of guilt
- Feeling dirty and unworthy or permanently damaged with fears of tainting others
- Feeling angry at self with self-blaming

Learning to deal effectively with the above issues, either personally or by referral, will make you more effective in your pastoral work and a greater blessing for those you serve. ☹

Resources for Your Veteran

During the Rural Clergy Training Workshop, participants learned about the most common symptoms and problems with PTSD. There are also many other problems that were not reviewed due to the limits of time. Issues include the relationship of PTSD to self-harm, sleep, anniversaries of traumas, nightmares, chronic pain and many more. To gain a deeper understanding of these issues, please visit : http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/fslist-other_common_problems.asp. ☹

The Clergy Connection

Did You Know?

Two common changes often brought back from wars zones by our warriors are Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Each condition has very different therapeutic treatment. The two conditions share several symptoms:

- Feeling tired a lot, having little energy or motivation
- Mood changes such as feeling sad or angry for no reason
- Increased sensitivity to sounds or distractions
- Having trouble sleeping
- Irritability, anger or rage

But there are also TBI symptoms that not often found with PTSD. Symptoms unique to TBI include:

- Light-headedness, dizziness or loss of balance
- Urge to vomit (nausea)
- Increased sensitivity to light
- Blurred vision or eyes that tire easily
- Reduced sense of smell or taste

We do not want you, as clergy, to try to diagnose these conditions. However, in making referrals to the VA, an accurate list of symptoms can help clinical staff get your warrior to the right services quickly. The VA's services for PTSD and TBI are among the most sophisticated in the world. Help us to help your Guard or Reserve warrior or your Veteran by giving us the best information when you call.

For more information on TBI: <http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/understanding-tbi/> ↻

A Community Success Story: Veteran's Camp

Many church camps have come on hard times as contributions to churches have diminished. These facilities can sit largely unused, particularly in the autumn and winter. Near Bangor, Maine, two affiliated camps offer a week of relaxation, family relationship building, and fun free of charge to returning warriors and Veterans and their families. Activities include a ropes course, pottery, wood working, cooking, acupuncture, fishing, yoga, tai chi and sledding. Costs are entirely paid through donations by local small businesses and individuals who wish to honor those who have served.

Speaking in an interview recorded for National Public Radio (NPR), Ray Suarez stated, "This isn't a therapeutic setting. It's not heavily programmed with a tight schedule to keep. After breakfast, you might wander over to a pottery class, paddle out from the dock and bait a hook or, this weekend, trade stories with Veterans

from earlier wars, get away from home and its demands and its pace." And from Lt. Col Andy Gibson, chaplain with the Maine National Guard: "What this does is it touches the person at a deeper level, at a spiritual level, a personal level. And it allows them to reunite with their families..." Think of the simple things a camp near your community might offer to enhance peace, meaning and quality of life for those who have served America and their families.

Is there a church camp near you with resources that could be used for a respite for warriors and their families? What would it take to develop such an effort in your community? How might you get started?

Want more information on Veteran's Camp? Go to: <http://www.kieve.org/veterans> ↻



The Rural Clergy Training Program is supported by the VHA Office of Rural Health.
For more information, please visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining.