Slide 1

Veteran health care in the community practice setting

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Slide 2

Table of Contents

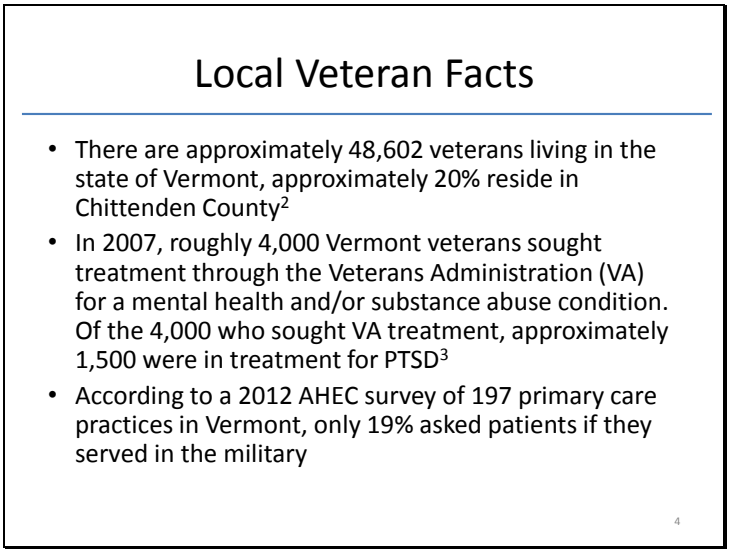
Slide 3

I. Veterans as a unique patient population

"Military veterans could be considered a "cultural group" when teaching about cultural diversity. This would allow for discussions about common issues like unemployment, marital and psychological stresses, substance abuse, suicide, and the potential for occupational disability."[1]

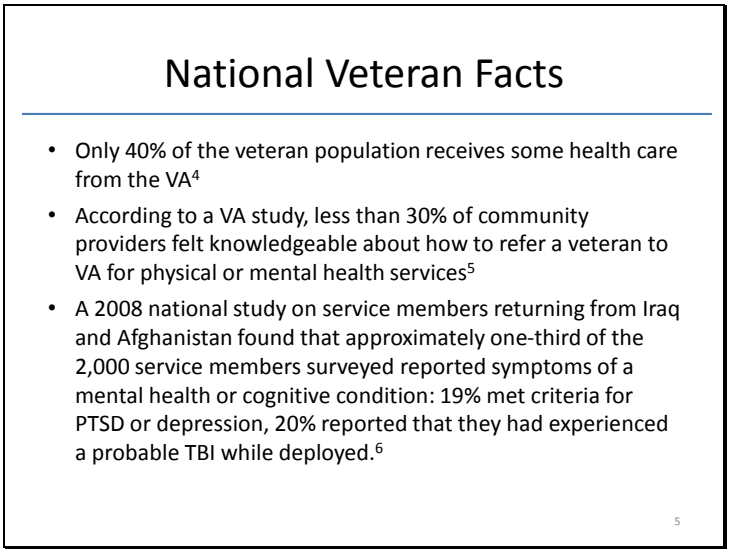
Jeffrey L. Brown, M.D., Vietnam Veteran

Slide 4



Vermont, a small, mostly rural, state with a population the size of a large city (623,908) has been heavily burdened by the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among the 50 states, Vermont has experienced the second highest per capita deployment of National Guard service members to Iraq, and the greatest number of per capita Iraq War deaths (New York Times, March 2, 2005).

Slide 5



Many combat veterans who have experienced trauma fail to avail themselves of treatment services. For some veterans, the symptoms of their condition may inhibit their ability or willingness to engage in treatment. A 2008 RAND study, completed by the RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research, also found that few service members had sought care for their symptoms. Only **53%** of those who reported symptoms of PTSD or depression, and **43%** of those with probable TBI had pursued treatment. Moreover, of those treated, only slightly more than half received treatment that study researchers deemed *minimally adequate* based upon its type and duration (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

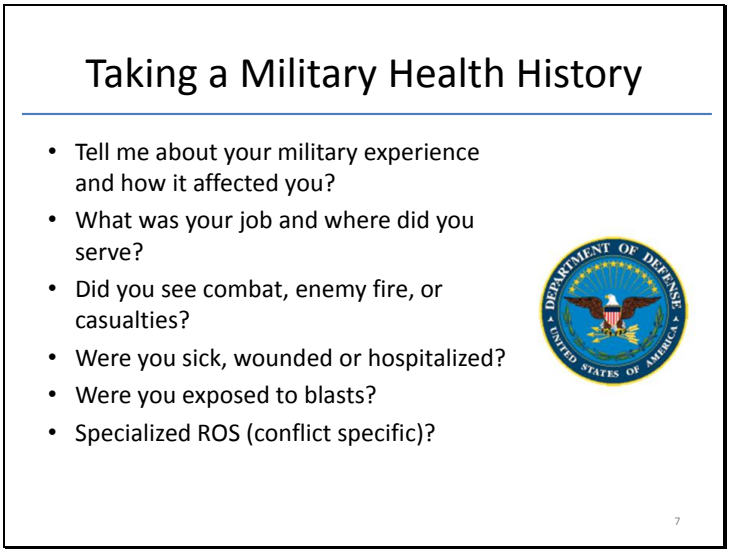
Slide 6

II. Taking a Military Health History

"Like most physicians, I was never trained to routinely ask patients if they were veterans or taught how to take a military health history. I believed that the likelihood of seeing patients who were veterans was small and that those with service-related conditions were already receiving attention at the Veterans Health Administration. Both assumptions were wrong."[1]

Jeffrey L. Brown, M.D., Vietnam Veteran

Slide 7



When the answer to the question "Have you ever served in the military?" is YES, providers should be prepared to take a focused military history. The information obtained from a military history is very valuable because Veterans who might have sequelae stemming from their military service will now have possible service-related causes included in their differential diagnosis. To download a FREE copy of the VA's Military Health History Card visit: http://www.va.gov/oaa/archive/Military-Health-History-Card-for-print.pdf

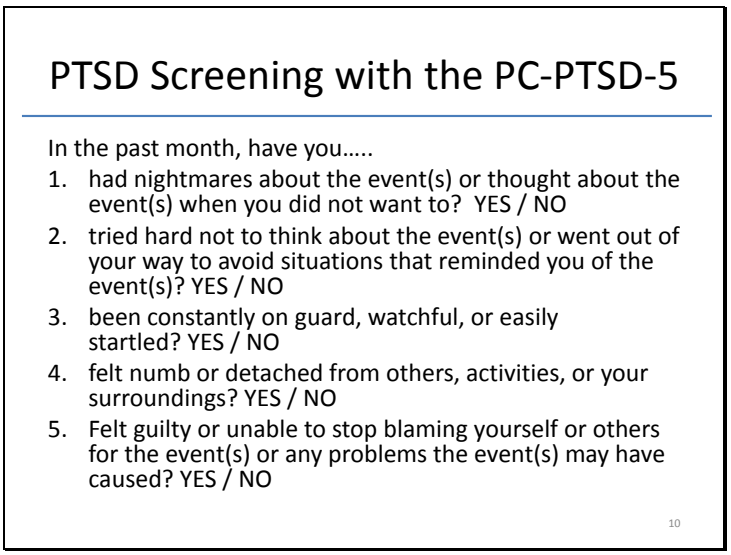
Slide 8

Some conditions like PTSD transcend all conflicts but other types of illnesses are highly dependent on specific exposures during different conflicts. Exposure history can be obtained from a focused Military Health History. For example, for the purposes of VA compensation benefits, Veterans who served anywhere in Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides, as specified in the Agent Orange Act of 1991. These Veterans do not need to show that they were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides in order to get disability compensation for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure. To learn more about exposures visit: http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/

Slide 9

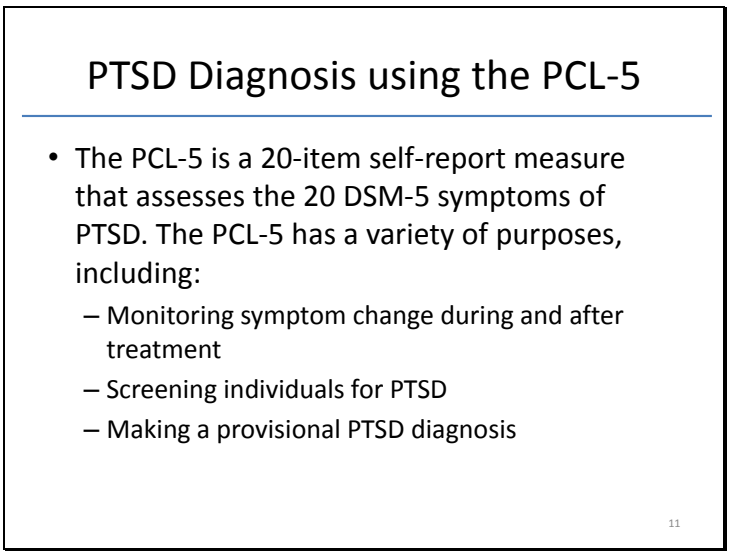
III. Tools for PTSD Screening, Diagnosis & Treatment

Slide 10



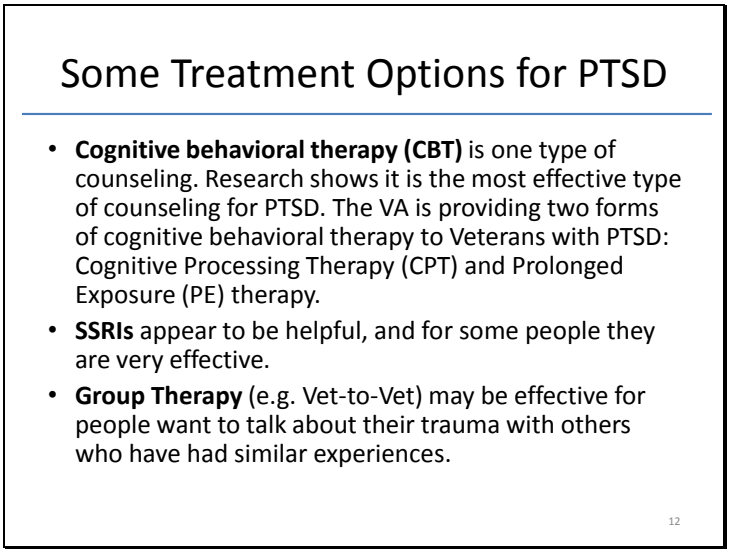
Notes: The PC-PTSD-5 is a five-item screen that was designed for use in primary care and other medical settings, and is currently used to screen for PTSD in Veterans at the VA. Answering **"YES"** to **3 or more** questions is considered a positive screen.

Slide 11



Notes: A positive screen with the PC-PTSD-5 should be followed up with the PCL-5. A total score **>38** on the PCL-5 in a typical civilian primary care setting is sufficient for making a provisional PTSD diagnosis in civilians or veterans.

Slide 12



To learn more about VA treatments shown to be effective for PTSD visit:
http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/therapy-med/treatment-ptsd.asp

Slide 13

IV. VA Veteran Resources

Slide 14

VA Veteran Resources

- VA Mental Health services: http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/
- **PTSD** care with information for Veterans and for Providers: http://www.ptsd.va.gov
- Info on **exposure hazards** during the military: http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/
- PTSD Coach Mobile & Online: http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/cope/index.asp
- VA/DoD Clinical practice guidelines for PTSD, TBI, MUS: http://www.healthquality.va.gov/
- **Wellness resources** for the military and veteran community that all combat veterans should be referred to: http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/
- Vermont VA Community based Outpatient Clinics:
  - Bennington: (802) 447-6913
  - Brattleboro: (802) 251-2200
  - Burlington: (802) 657-7000
  - Newport: (802) 624-2400
  - Rutland: (802) 772-2300
  - White River Junction VA Medical Center: (802) 295-9363
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255
- 1-877-WAR-VETS (1-877-927-8387) is an around the clock confidential call center where combat Veterans can call to talk to another combat Veteran.

Slide 15

V. Community Veteran Resources

15

Slide 16

Community Veteran Resources

- **Vermont Veterans Outreach** (802-734-2123) helps identify veteran needs and then refers veterans to the appropriate service providers: http://veterans.vermont.gov/transitions/outreach
- **Vermont Vet to Vet** (802-485-4534) is a veteran based organization which provides peer support recovery services to all veterans, including those veterans who are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan: http://www.vtvettovet.org/
- **Vermont Veteran Services** (802-656-3232) helps veteran families who are homeless or imminently at risk of homelessness gain and retain stable housing. Services Include: Case Management, Housing search and placement, Employment/Income support services, Veteran peer services, Assistance accessing VA benefits, Connection to community supports and legal services: http://www.vermontveteranservices.org/
- **Vet Centers** (S. Burlington: 802-862-1806) provide counseling in a relaxed setting to combat veterans and their families. They provide treatment for PTSD, family stress, and substance abuse: http://www1.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?ID=477&dnum=All&stateid=VT&v=1
- **Wild Roots Farm** (wildrootsfarmvt@gmail.com) is dedicated to helping veterans interested in agriculture become educated in the industry. The farm is also dedicated to helping veterans cope with battlefield stresses and re-acclimate to life after war. It's a place where veterans can share their experiences with each other, or just spend time in the wilderness.

Slide 17

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6. Rand Study: The Invisible Wounds of War, 2008.http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG720.pdf

Slide 18

Thank You

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