

TheCypressTimes

Christian. Conservative. Online. Daily News.



Print this
article

DEBAKEY VA OPENS NEW MENTAL HEALTH UNITS TO CARE FOR SPECIAL NEEDS OF RETURNING COMBAT TROOPS AND FOR WOMEN VETERANS

Published 11/19/2009 - 7:48 a.m. CST

The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) recently opened two new nursing units to provide specialized inpatient mental health services for returning combat troops and for women Veterans.

"This initiative is extremely important and will significantly enhance our ability to provide mental health care to these two groups of Veterans," said Adam C. Walms, MEDVAMC director.

One of the new inpatient units focuses on the unique needs of our nation's newest Veterans, the troops who have served in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq (OIF).

Combat Veterans are at higher risk for psychiatric problems than military personnel serving in noncombat locations, and more frequent and more intense combat is associated with higher risk. Many of the challenges facing these service members are stressors that have been identified and studied in Veterans of previous wars. In response, VA has developed world class expertise in treating chronic mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anger management, substance abuse, and depressive disturbances.

The MEDVAMC also added a mental health inpatient unit with 10 beds especially for women Veterans. By 2010, women Veterans will make up more than 14 percent of the total Veteran population. This new inpatient unit will respond to the distinctive mental health needs of this group and accommodate female Veterans who do not feel comfortable in mixed-gender treatment settings.

Women are 20 times more likely than men to endure sexual assault or sexual harassment in the military, according to specialists who counsel such Veterans. VA refers to these experiences as military sexual trauma or MST. Like other types of trauma, MST can negatively impact a person's mental and physical health, even many years later.

Some problems associated with MST include disturbing memories or nightmares, feelings of depression or numbness, problems with alcohol or other drugs, problems with anger or irritability, and difficulty feeling safe.

The MEDVAMC Mental Health Care Line offers full interdisciplinary assessments of all patients and provides on-site treatment and referrals as needed, medication management, individual and group therapy, PTSD education groups, PTSD and substance abuse dual diagnosis groups, an intensive day hospital program, a sexual trauma track, a trauma recovery program, applied research such as medication trial and psychotherapy, a specialized smoking cessation program, alumni peer support groups, and coordination and formal consultation with the outpatient clinics in Beaumont, Conroe, Galveston, and Lufkin and the Houston Vet Centers.