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## VA official: Civilians must help in identifying combat trauma

The public must be enlisted in the fight against combat stress because veterans often don't know they suffer from problems, a top Veterans Affairs official said Thursday

**Tammy Duckworth** is an assistant secretary at the VA, who lost both legs while serving in Iraq. She was the keynote speaker at the 2010 Virginia is for Heroes Conference in Richmond.

Half-jokingly, she referred to her fellow soldiers as stubborn and hard-headed, the last ones to seek help.

She also spoke haltingly about the fellow soldier who saved her life by pulling her from a wrecked helicopter.

"Often, it is us who see the signs of trouble in a veteran before they are willing to admit it," she said. "Maybe it's the colleague or supervisor at work who notices that short-term memory is affected. It is the children who get snapped at because maybe a brain injury is affecting ability to control emotions."

Military leaders have spoken about changing a culture that rewards toughness while discouraging traumatized veterans from coming forward because mental problems are a sign of "weakness."

In a later interview, Duckworth said the Defense Department is making strides in that regard, but she said many veterans simply may not know they are afflicted.

"They just think everyone around them is being ridiculous," she said.