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Veterans mental health unit to help those coming back from war

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JACKSON, MS (WLBT) - The Sonny Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson held a ribbon cutting ceremony on Friday to recognize the opening of their new mental health unit.

"It really is very sobering when we hear of about the number of veterans that are struggling with mental illnesses," said Medical Center Director Linda Watson.

Reports show that soldiers coming back from war often suffer from illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

"When they leave the military and start accessing care in the VA, we have a responsibility to try to help them get the care that they need," Associate Chief of Staff of Mental Health, Jeff Parker.

The new state of the art unit is over 18 thousand square feet and will house 25 veterans.

Parker says the highlighting feature is safety. "The VA has had a very strong effort toward suicide prevention for the last couple of years. And this unit has been designed in consideration of safety in every... from top to bottom."

However, not only veterans coming back from combat experience mental illness.

Veteran Paul Warren entered the military over 30 years ago. He never into war, but had an accident later in life and went blind in one eye.

"You learn you don't ask for help. You know, I'll tough it out, I'll get through this," Warren said.

Warren says he never dealt with the psychological help to get through it and went into a deep depression. He soon realized he couldn't cope with it alone.

"And finally it got so bad that I came to the emergency room, and I just didn't really care about my life at that time."

Warren says he now has a new outlook on life and looks forward to the future.

The VA center also says that more women and young adults have entered the mental health unit in the past few years. They say more than likely it reflects the group going over to Iraq and Afghanistan.

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