



## Women Veterans' Health: Sexx Matters

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**Source:** Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR)

Newswise — Washington, DC (August 3, 2011) - The physical and mental health problems affecting women veterans are a major issue within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense, and the catalyst for the Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR) congressional briefing, Women Veteran's Health: Sexx Matters held on Tuesday, August 2.

Women account for 14.5% of the United States military, and there are currently 1.84 million female veterans. While some research has been done on sex and gender differences in health conditions prevalent among veterans, more needs to be conducted.

Christine Carter, PhD, Vice President of Scientific Affairs at SWHR opened the briefing with findings from SWHR's recent conference, What a Difference an X Makes, "Focus on the Female Veteran" which highlighted the health issues facing women veterans today. Some issues include Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, which affect female veterans at higher rates than their male counterparts, pelvic floor disorders and sex differences in wound recovery rates. Carter commented that "biological risk and resilience differs by sex."

Kate McGraw, PhD, Senior Consulting Psychologist, Psychological Health, CSoC, Defense Centers of Excellence reminded the audience that it has been a relatively short timeframe that women have been integrated into the services. The opportunities for research that accompany the increased numbers of women serving are thus available but brand new. McGraw reported on the status of research on female military service members and veterans, which includes research into psychological health including PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma (MST). MST, which includes sexual harassment, affects women significantly more than men, with 15-22% of women reporting such incidents as opposed to 0.7% of men. McGraw also discussed the need for research on sex differences in mental health, and noted that the Department of Defense is working collaboratively with the VA to address these areas of research.

The final speaker, Robert Jaeger, PhD, Director of Deployment Health for VA's Rehabilitation Engineering and Prosthetics/Orthotics Program, spoke about the work being done at VA to help women veterans live with greater mobility after injury or amputation. This progress is in great part due to the advancement in prosthetics technology. Jaeger noted that limb cosmetics are designed mostly for men and therefore may not properly fit women; however, investments are being made to meet the new VA female population. He demonstrated where VA plans to go in the future with prosthetic devices by sharing an exciting new mechanical arm prototype exhibited by female veterans, and discussed new research that aims to use brain computer interface technology for future prosthetic devices.

The physical and mental health needs of women veterans cannot go overlooked. Strides must be made through continued sex-based research on the issues that affect our brave women in uniform.

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For more information on the Society for Women's Health Research please contact Rachel Griffith at 202-496-5001 or Rachel@swhr.org.

The Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR), a national non-profit organization based in Washington D.C., is widely recognized as the thought leader in women's health research, particularly how sex differences impact health. SWHR's mission is to improve the health of all women through advocacy, education and research. Visit SWHR's website at swhr.org for more information.

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Women's Health, Iraq/Afghanistan War

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### Contact Information

*Available for logged-in reporters only*

### Description

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