



Module 9: The Experience of Veterans from Different War Eras

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Module 9 The Experiences of Veterans from Different War Eras

Faculty has no relevant financial relationships to disclose.

Education in Palliative and End-of-life Care for Veterans is a collaborative effort between the Department of Veterans Affairs and EPEC®

Objectives

- Understand the transformative experience of military service in the life of veterans
- Understand how Veterans' cultural experience can be a source of strength and meaning
- Understand how veterans' cultural experience varies based on time and type of service

Clinical case

Introduction

- Military service is an acquired cultural experience that continues long after discharge
- The cultural context of Veterans can have positive and negative impacts on their end-of-life care
- It can be a source of strength, and a source of distress

Experience of service

- All-volunteer armed forces for 35 years
- Veterans share the cultural diversity of our country, and the common bond of having served
- Many Veterans seek out Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)

Military history

- First European settlers lived close to soldiers for protection
- American revolution
- Each generation has war; each generation produces Veterans
- Military/Veterans often see integration of race, gender, etc. before mainstream society

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Leaving a legacy

- Veterans Oral History Project
allows archiving of Veterans' stories
- More informal methods
any clinician can ask: "Tell me about your service"

Warrior culture

- Most new recruits young, fresh out of high school
some search for purpose
better economic circumstances
search for adventure

Basic training

- Turns soldiers into squads
privilege, duty, connectedness
- Initiation into warrior class/stoicism
PTSD
depression
substance abuse

Feelings about service

- Pride
- Strength of the group
- Moral ambiguity from wartime actions
PTSD
guilt/regret
- Veterans who have seen combat
almost all carry some suffering

World War II

- Almost all WWII Veterans > 80 years of age
- Many died or were wounded
- Pride in American victory over fascism
- Segregation
- Many have injuries from combat or environmental exposure
radiation
mustard gas

Cold War

- Arms race
radiation exposure due to above ground nuclear testing
anger/mistrust of government, including VA
- Every VA has a registry physician
Agent Orange
Gulf War Syndrome
ionizing radiation

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Korean Conflict

- Many Americans unfamiliar
- No clear victory
 - some feel service unappreciated
- Environmental exposure
 - injuries from extreme heat and cold
 - cold sensitivity
- Veterans may minimize experiences
 - many relive experiences

Vietnam War...

- Source of much angst for United States
- Controversial
 - distrust of political leadership
 - first guerilla war
 - hard to separate combatants and civilians
 - soldiers could never let guard down
 - hard to have sense of accomplishment
- Dissent at home

...Vietnam War

- Great physical, emotional, existential trauma
- severely wounded more likely to survive
- reintegration difficult
 - alcohol/substance use/abuse
 - many mental health issues, PTSD
 - Agent Orange
 - Hepatitis C
 - traumatic brain injury

Persian Gulf Wars...

- Many exposed to environmental toxins
 - burning oil fields
 - depleted uranium, etc.
 - multiple vaccinations
- Gulf War Syndrome
 - memory loss
 - fibromyalgia symptoms
 - no specific test or markers

...Persian Gulf Wars

- Two conditions correlate with service
 - ALS
 - respiratory problems
 - asthma
 - exposure to high levels of smoke
- Young age means few need palliative care
 - will change as population ages

OEF/OIF

- Early evidence suggests psychological toll will be worse than physical toll
 - prolonged exposure to combat stress
 - increasing incidence of suicide/attempts
 - depression
 - PTSD
 - traumatic brain injury

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Summary