Supporting Veterans Through Community Partnerships:

Samuel Santos, MA
Dean of Students, City College, San Francisco
ssantos@ccsf.edu

Keith Armstrong, LCSW
Director, Veterans Outreach Program
SFVA Medical Center
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, UCSF
keith.armstrong@va.gov
415-750-2190
415-239-3679
OEF/OIF/OND Veterans

• Approximately 2.5 million men and women have served in Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Enduring Freedom (OEF), and/or New Dawn (OND) since 2001.

• In a sample of 103,788 OEF/OIF Veterans seen at VA clinics between 2001-2005, 25% received a mental health diagnosis.

• Most common mental health diagnoses include:
  • PTSD
  • Anxiety
  • Adjustment disorder
  • Depression
  • Substance use

2. Seal, Archives of Internal Medicine, 2007
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

• TBI has been called the "signature injury" of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan\(^1\)

• \(~15\%\) prevalence among Army infantry Iraq Veterans\(^2\)

• Highly comorbid with PTSD and depression; symptom overlap

• Can cause problems with attention, memory, and language; headaches; sleep disturbance; and personality changes

1. Hampton, JAMA 2011
2. Hoge, NEJM 2008
• OEF/ OIF/OND Vets diagnosed with PTSD are less likely to engage in specialty care at traditional VA medical centers than non OEF/OIF/OND Veterans\(^1\)

• 25-50% of OEF/OIF/OND Vets with mental health diagnoses seek treatment; high drop out rate (over 40% in some clinical samples\(^2-4\))

OEF/OIF/OND Veterans and Treatment Engagement

Factors Found to Influence Treatment Engagement:

- **Location**: Distance from VA inversely related to number of sessions received among Vets with PTSD

- **Stigma**: may vary by military branch; may be self stigma, or associated with peers and superiors

- **Negative perceptions of mental health treatment**: Negative attitudes about treatment inversely correlated with treatment seeking

- **Emotional readiness for treatment**
  2. Kim, *Psychiatric Services*, 2010
OEF/OIF/OND Veterans as College Students
OEF/OIF/OND Veterans as College Students

- The Post-9/11 GI Bill, passed by Congress in 2008, greatly expanded educational benefits for Veterans who served in the Armed Forces on or after 9/11/01

![Participants in VA Education Programs by Fiscal Year (in thousands)](chart.png)

1 Million as of Nov. 2013
Student Veterans and Mental Health

In a 2011 online survey of 628 student Veterans:

- 46% reported suicidal thoughts during their lifetime; 20% reported suicidal thoughts with a plan
- 7.7% reported a history of a suicide attempt
- 35% reported severe anxiety
- 24% reported severe depression
- 46% reported symptoms of posttraumatic stress at some point

Rudd, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. 2011
Challenges for Veterans in College

• Student Veterans have reported frustrations within the college environment
  • OEF/OIF/OND students may have difficulties with peers; may view classmates as not serious enough, not pulling their weight on group projects, not respectful of authority/teachers

• National survey of 362,000 first-year students and seniors attending 564 US colleges/universities found that Veterans:
  • Perceived lower levels of campus support than non-Veterans
  • Interacted less with faculty members
  • Spent twice as many hours per week working
  • Spent six times as many hours on dependent care
  • Often received the least amount of help

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 2010
City College and San Francisco VA MC: Veterans Outreach Program (VOP)

- SFVA is the first VA Medical Center to establish a mental health program on a community college campus
- Over 1,300 Veterans accessing the GI Bill at CCSF
- Collaboration between student Veterans, CCSF, SFVAMC, local unions and individual donors
- Multidisciplinary team: LCSWs, psychologist, psychiatrist, LMFT, member services, volunteers
- Office located adjacent to CCSF Academic Counselors, Educational Benefits and Veteran Resource Center and Lounge
- Now one of 23 Veterans Integration To Academic Leadership (VITAL) sites nationwide
CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO

CCSF VA Program: Outreach Statistics

1268 VETERANS SEEN (UNIQUE)

452 ENROLLED IN SFVA CARE

270 NEW TO VA CARE
Program Goals

• Provide preventative services on campus

• Reduce stigma and barriers to VA and mental health care

• Provide mental health and social work services that are convenient and driven by student Veterans’ needs and interests

• Support attendance and academic success

• Enroll student veterans in VA healthcare, and provide education about the services to which they are entitled as VA patients
VOP Keys to Treatment Engagement

• Staff rapport, patience, and open-door policy
• Meeting Veterans where they are, on their schedule and on a timeframe that they feel comfortable seeking care
• Accessibility of services in familiar setting
• Range of services available; tailored to individual needs
• Connection with other CCSF service providers like Disabled Students Services
• Strong working relationship with CCSF administration and student Veteran organization
Joe's Gym is closed, while Bob's Biggie Burgers is open 24/7. The man from Joe's Gym is holding a hammer and signs that say "Closed." A sign outside Bob's Burgers says "Open 24/7." The phrase "Location, Location, Location" is also present.
"The lounge is a home away from home, a place where students can study and congregate prior to going home to their families." - CCSF student Veteran
VOP Local and National Recognition

Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki

“We recently initiated a new campus outreach effort headed by Derek Blumke called VITAL—Veterans Integration To Academic Leadership…Since August 2010, the San Francisco Medical Center has helped over 500 Veterans enrolled at San Francisco City College, more than 200 of whom are also now enrolled in the VA healthcare system.” 12/9/11
VOP is currently establishing a presence on multiple campuses in the Bay Area…

- University of California, San Francisco (UCSF)
- San Francisco State University (SFSU)
- Skyline College (San Bruno)
- Academy of Art University (AAU)
- University of San Francisco (USF)
VOP Expansion Beyond City College

...and planning future expansion to the SFVA catchment area at large

- College of the Redwoods (planning fall 2014)
- Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC)
- Dominican University
- Napa Valley College
- College of Marin
Veterans Outreach Program: Expansion

Expansion activities include the following:

- Needs Assessments with student Veterans and faculty/staff
- 2-Part Enrollment Events; 1) Navigating VA Health Care Speaker Series presentations; followed by 2) On-Site VA Enrollment and Photo ID Card Events
- Monthly Speaker Series Program
- Faculty/Staff Education
- Student Veteran resource fairs, events, and orientations on campus