

Behavioral Health Provider Training

Overview

The behavioral health problems afflicting our service members are not exclusively military in nature. Many civilian doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists are equipped to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depressive disorder (MDD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI) in the general population. Too often, however, they lack the knowledge of military culture required to form lasting, beneficial connections with patients from the military sphere. The culture of perseverance ingrained in veterans, service members and their families can make it difficult to accept treatment from health care professionals, and this difficulty is compounded by the relative unfamiliarity of these health care professionals with the demands of military life. Attrition rates, particularly in the realm of behavioral health care, are high. In order to supply the military community with the care and understanding they need and deserve, we must act to bring appropriate provider training to communities across the United States.

There are three basic steps to offering provider training: 1) Call Providers to Action; 2) Identify Available and Effective Training Tools; and 3) Identify and Develop Ways to Bring Provider Training to the Community.

Is it being done already? Recent years have seen a surge in public and private provider training programs geared towards treating service members and their families. It is generally more helpful to direct providers towards these programs – designed, created and maintained by experts – than to create your own. Assess the community, contact nearby programs and work with interested parties to facilitate outreach to as many providers as possible. Note, also, that an increasing number of provider training programs are available on the web. National mental health associations – American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, National Association of Social Workers and National Association of Pastoral Counselors – and their state and regional counterparts are also excellent resources, and can provide information on available services online and in your local community.

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Call Providers to Action

Providers may not see the necessity of specialized training dealing exclusively with the military community, or may simply be unaware of the programs available to them. In order to better serve the veterans, service members and their families, you must first motivate health care providers in your local community to action.

- **Fact Sheet:** Create a simple fact sheet for distribution to care providers in the area. Your sheet should explain, clearly and concisely, the importance of proper provider training for those serving the military community. Keep your fact sheet to the point and emphasize the relevance of provider training to your community in particular. For example, you may wish to include information on the size and demography of the local military community: How many veterans are there? Service members? Spouses and children? Caregivers, dependents, and other members of the military family?

- **Community Solidarity:** Identify military and Veterans Affairs behavioral health providers in the area, and develop an event to introduce local providers to the military community. Though the primary reason specialized provider training is necessary is to familiarize health care professionals with the issues unique to the military community, it is of equal importance that the military community become familiar with providers. Initial barriers to care are high, and high rates of attrition plague many programs. Increasing community solidarity will address these challenges, and will engage providers with one of their key demographics. It is also important that you be able to assess the relationship between the military community and health care providers.
- **Appeal to Business Sense:** Decisions motivated by financial necessity are not often pursued with the same conviction as those reached through idealism. Nevertheless, it can be valuable to emphasize the financial aspects of provider care. Undertaking provider care demonstrates a commitment to the local military community, which in turn strengthens the reputation of the provider. Word of mouth is arguably the largest factor in a provider's ability to attract business – a factor that will only increase in importance as online rating sites continue to gain prominence as a way to identify clinics, doctors and other health care professionals.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Provider liaison

Task: Develop a list of behavioral health providers within the community; research and compile information on the demographics of the community, such as the number of veterans, service members and families; perform preliminary outreach to providers

Attributes: Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; should also be willing and able to learn about and discuss the behavioral health difficulties facing veterans and the military community; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Step 2: Identify Available and Effective Training Tools

You should have already familiarized yourself with the services available in your community through your gap analysis and other evaluations. Unfortunately, most communities do not have immediate access to provider care offered by behavioral health experts. Below are some key resources you may wish to utilize to locate additional types of provider training, as well as to keep abreast of developments in the field of behavioral health.

- **Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE):** DCoE assesses, validates, oversees and facilitates prevention, resilience, identification, treatment, outreach, rehabilitation and reintegration programs for psychological health and TBI. DCoE also provides a centralized location where providers can view webinars, conferences, etc. in health care for the military community.
- **BrainlineMilitary.org:** A website that provides military-specific information and resources on TBI. The site features video, webcasts, articles, personal stories, research briefs and current news.

- **Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC):** DVBIC serves active duty military, their beneficiaries and veterans with TBIs through state-of-the-art clinical care, innovative clinical research initiatives and educational programs. DVBIC also provides a comprehensive listing of upcoming provider training seminars and conferences, and maintains a calendar of events further in the future.
- **National Center for PTSD:** A VA-run center of excellence for research and education on the prevention, understanding and treatment of PTSD. The National Center provides no direct clinical care, working instead to improve the well-being and understanding of American Veterans throughout the country. The site provides extensive information for both providers and veterans.
- **See *Other Resources* for links and more information**

The above resources are not meant to be a comprehensive list of the available provider training services. However, each does list upcoming seminars, webinars, conferences, etc. in areas highly relevant to behavioral health. They also provide a significant amount of information geared specifically to health care providers working in the military community. While attempting to locate provider training available in your community, be sure to visit the websites first.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Provider training logistics specialist

Task: Develop a list of online and in-person provider training conferences, companies and seminars; alert local service providers to upcoming events in the field of behavioral health; work with local providers to ensure maximum participation in provider training sessions

Attributes: Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; should also be willing and able to learn about and discuss the behavioral health difficulties facing veterans and the military community; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Step 3: Identify and Develop Ways to Bring Provider Training to the Community

Once you have researched and identified the requisite training tools, you must develop methods to bring them to the community. Below are some ideas you may wish to consider:

- **Provider Training Fund:** Though some types of provider training are free, many are not. Consider developing a Provider Training Fund to be used to send local providers to behavioral health conferences and seminars. Funding can be raised through donations. Even for free conferences, covering travel fees may encourage providers to participate in training when they might otherwise not have. Though the goal is to provide better care for as many veterans, service members and families as possible, you may wish to institute an application process in order to ensure that providers will use the funds in a responsible and effective manner.

- **Raise Awareness in the Target Community:** Many veterans, service members and their families are unaware of what constitutes an effective health care professional. They do not know what questions to ask or what qualifications signify a greater understanding of the military community. By raising awareness of provider training programs within the military community, you can encourage local mental health professionals to participate in training programs and provide better care. For more information on raising awareness, see *Promising Practice #1: Annual Public Awareness Campaign*.
- **TRICARE:** TRICARE is the health insurance provider of most veterans, service members and their family members. While there are many ways to service the behavioral health needs of the mental health community beyond TRICARE, it can be helpful to raise awareness of the TRICARE network with providers in your local community. Be sure to emphasize in your efforts that electing not to join the TRICARE network does not preclude providers from benefiting the military community.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Community outreach specialist

Task: Develop a list of potential donors to the Provider Training Fund; initiate contact with relevant parties and explain the importance of provider training; solicit donations

Attributes: Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; should be able to discuss the behavioral health difficulties facing the military community and the importance of provider training to effective care; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Title: Provider outreach specialist

Task: Identify local providers serving the military community; initiate contact with relevant parties; discuss the importance of provider training; explain the purpose, availability and criteria associated with the Provider Training Fund

Attributes: Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; should be able to discuss the behavioral health difficulties facing the military community and the importance of provider training to effective care; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Measure Success

Measuring the success of provider training is important, particularly if you have elected to participate in those methods requiring fees. You must be able to evaluate which types of training are effective and which are not. Doing so will enable you to better focus your efforts moving forward, and will greatly streamline your methodology in the months and years to come.

It can be difficult to accurately measure the effect of provider training. Though patient surveys provide the most accurate picture of the effectiveness of and overall satisfaction in a particular

provider, you will most likely not have access to this information. Below are some additional ideas you may wish to use to evaluate the effect of your efforts:

- **Anonymous Patient Reviews:** Patient data is privileged information. Many patients are unwilling to disclose medical information, particularly in the military community and in the field of behavioral health. Though anonymous reviews are typically less credible, you may wish to establish a website or call-in number where members of the military community can comment on providers, provide information as to their receptiveness to the needs of the military, etc. This can be public or private, depending on your particular interest, but be sure to emphasize the community orientation of the site. Establishing and managing a forum, Wiki or other interactive form of online community requires little to no coding experience, but may prove immensely valuable to your efforts and to the community as a whole.
- **Provider Surveys:** Present behavioral health care providers in the community with a survey asking them to evaluate the overall effectiveness of any provider training courses or programs they have participated in. Some questions you may wish to consider: In which provider training programs did they participate? Do they feel that they better understand the military community? Has their standard of care improved? Has their participation in provider training had any impact on their business? Did your efforts through the Community Blueprint Network have any effect on their decision to partake in provider training? For information on surveying methodology, see the *Surveying Guideline Tool* (Tool 5.2).
- **Track the Numbers:** At the most basic level, it can be valuable simply to see how many providers are engaging in provider training. Providers may also be willing to share broad, nonspecific information, such as number of patients, percentage of patients from the military community, etc. This information may prove valuable in future press releases, communications with local providers and in any other communiqués dealing with provider training.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Provider review manager

Task: Create an online community in which veterans, service members and their families can anonymously review, rate and discuss local providers; compile and maintain a list of behavioral health providers on the site; moderate the online community to ensure civil and healthy debate

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should be comfortable with online communities and social media; experience with online community building, online marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) and general community management is a plus, but not required; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Other Resources

- **BrainlineMilitary.org:** <http://www.brainlinemilitary.org/>
 - A website that provides military-specific information and resources on TBI. The site features video, webcasts, articles, personal stories, research briefs and current news.
- **Center for Social Innovation:** <http://www.center4si.com/>
 - The Center for Social Innovation brings a fresh perspective to society's most difficult social problems. The Center believes the solutions to homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse and community violence are already known. To implement them, the Center works to close the gap between research and practice, providing real-world tools, training and technical assistance to providers throughout the country.
- **Citizen Soldier Support Program (CSSP):** <http://www.citizensoldiersupport.org/>
 - CSSP is a congressionally authorized, federally funded grant administered through the Odum Institute for Research and Social Science at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. To prepare civilian providers to address post deployment issues facing OEF/OIF veterans and their families, CSSP has partnered with Area Health Education Centers and medical providers from the Department of Veterans Affairs, United States Navy and United States Public Health Service to create on-site and online courses for PTSD and TBI, Women Returning from Combat and Family Issues.
- **Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE):** <http://www.dcoe.health.mil/>
 - DCoE assesses, validates, oversees and facilitates prevention, resilience, identification, treatment, outreach, rehabilitation and reintegration programs for psychological health and traumatic brain injury (TBI). DCoE also provides a centralized location where providers can see upcoming webinars, conferences, etc. in the fields of health care for the military community.
- **Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC):** <http://www.dvbic.org/>
 - DVBIC serves active duty military, their beneficiaries and veterans with TBI through state-of-the-art clinical care, innovative clinical research initiatives and educational programs. DVBIC also provides a comprehensive listing of upcoming provider training seminars and conferences, and maintains a calendar of events further in the future.
- **Give an Hour:** www.giveanhour.org/
 - Give an Hour aims to develop national networks of volunteers capable of responding to both acute and chronic conditions that arise within our society. Their first target population is the U.S. troops and families who are being affected by the current military conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and supporting areas. Give an Hour operates by asking mental health professionals nationwide to literally donate an hour of their time each week to provide free mental health services to military personnel and their families.

- **National Center for PTSD:** <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
 - A VA-run center of excellence for research and education on the prevention, understanding and treatment of PTSD. The National Center provides no direct clinical care, working instead to improve the well-being and understanding of American Veterans throughout the country. The site provides extensive information for both providers and veterans.
- **Perdue University: The Military Family Research Institute:** <http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/MFRI/public/Default.aspx>
 - Through research and outreach, the Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) works closely with collaborators to improve the lives of service members and their families in Indiana and across the country. MFRI is partnering with The Indiana National Guard (INNG) and the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) to create Star Behavioral Health Providers, a registry that helps service members and those who care about them locate civilian behavioral health professionals with special training to understand and deal with military issues. As part of this program health providers receive training. The training curriculum has been developed in conjunction with the Center for Deployment Psychology. Initial sessions are currently underway across Indiana.
- **Real Warriors Campaign:** <http://www.realwarriors.net/>
 - The Real Warriors Campaign is an initiative launched by the DCoE to promote the processes of building resilience, facilitating recovery and supporting reintegration of returning veterans, service members and their families. The site features a comprehensive section specifically for “Health Professionals,” and provides a wealth of valuable information and material.
- **RESPECT-Mil:** <http://www.pdhealth.mil/respect-mil/index1.asp>
 - A treatment model designed by the United States Department of Defense's Deployment Health Clinical Center (DDHC) to screen, assess and treat active duty soldiers with PTSD and depression. RESPECT-Mil provides information for primary care clinicians and behavioral health experts. The site also engages in web-based provider training and has a number of specialized care guides, tools for implementation, etc.
- **The Steptoe Group, LLC:** <http://www.thesteptoe.com/>
 - The Steptoe Group is committed to working in partnership with government agencies and private organizations to ensure access by all citizens to quality health, science and education services. The company has recently launched its Warrior-Patient Centric Healthcare Training Seminar Series™, which is designed to equip providers with the techniques needed to support wounded warriors, veterans and their families.
- **TRICARE:** <http://www.tricare.mil/>
 - TRICARE is the health care program serving uniformed service members, retirees and their families worldwide.
 - For a comprehensive guide to joining the TRICARE network, see here: <http://www.realwarriors.net/healthprofessionals/tricare/tricaredoctor.php>. For a direct link to the first step in the process, see here: <http://www.tricare.mil/tma/becomeatricareprovider.aspx>.