Women Veterans Health in Rural Oregon

Cindi Warburton DNP | FNP-C
Women Veterans
– Overlooked and Underserved

- Our generation’s “Vietnam War”
- 10 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Women veterans are the fastest growing population of veterans
- They are in direct combat support roles
- Most women veterans do **NOT** use VA services, they use services from their community provider. Typically a FNP, MD or DO.
What we know about Women Veterans in the U.S.

- Women Veterans = 10% of Veteran Population in the US.
- Average age of women veterans = 43,
  Average age of male veterans = 63

This is a YOUNG population of Veterans.

- ONE in FIVE enlisted women are in combat support roles.
- ONE in FOUR women respond “YES” when screened for Military Sexual Trauma.

The top three health care issues for women veterans are

1. Musculoskeletal (55.9% women vs. 48.5% men)
2. Endocrine, metabolic, nutrition (44.5% women vs. 64.5% men)
3. Mental Health (44.5% women vs. 31.4% men)

Women Veterans in Oregon

- The number of women veterans in the US is approximately 2.2 million
- Oregon has **25,226** women veterans
- Central Oregon has over **1360** women veterans, of these only about **340** use the Bend VA clinic.

Where do women veterans go for their Health Care needs?

Community providers
Research Project

A qualitative analysis was conducted using in-depth interviews

- Six women veterans – asked about their perception of care at a VA or community clinic
- Six community providers - questioned about using screening questions for military experience

Rich in-depth interview data was obtained by using a small group of participants selected to provide a wide variety of views on the same subject.
Where do they go?

“I go to the VA for my specialty care only, otherwise everything I do is with civilian providers…”

“If I don’t have to use the VA then I won’t, it should be reserved for those that really need it…”

“It (VA) can be a negative place in general and I don’t want to be a part of that…”
Are they discussing their experience?

- Women are NOT asked by community providers about their military experience (n=0).
- Unless the patient brings it up, they are not likely to be asked.
- Women veterans reported that it was important to be asked.
- There was a perception that they may not be understood by their community provider.

“I’m not sure a community provider would really understand my experience in the military, I would only bring it up if they asked about it…”

“They just looked at me like I was crazy one time when I started talking about my military experience, so it just depends on how comfortable I feel with them if I share information or not…”
Perceptions of the VA System

“The specialist I see at the VA is great, but the staff seem incompetent and the system is full of loop-holes…”

“I’m not comfortable sitting in the waiting room full of grumpy old men while I wait for my appointment…”

“‘My doctor here (at the VA) is just awesome, we have long one hour appointments and I feel like she really listens to me…’”

- The local VA-CBOC was utilized in order to maintain VA care status, however a community provider was also used by the veteran.

- Levels of trust with the provider (VA and community) varies greatly.
Military Culture Awareness and Community Providers

“It is never a specific question that I ask…”

“I don’t ever ask. I should probably be doing that…”

Unless the patient brings up their experience, community providers are not likely to ask about it.

“I don’t know if I have any women veterans in my patient panel, it’s not something I really looked at before…”
Discussion Points

- Women Veterans in Central Oregon and the outlying rural areas use a community provider for their health care needs.
- Health care providers in the community are not routinely asking about military experience.
- There is a perception of not being well understood both by their community provider and their VA provider.
- There is a lack of military culture among health care providers in Central Oregon.
Recommendations

1. Raise awareness
2. Use standard screening tools
3. Increase knowledge of health risks for women veterans (and all veterans) among community providers.
Raising Awareness

Acknowledging Veterans and their military experience helps establish trust and can promote discussion of health concerns and facilitate referrals to VA resources.

American Academy of Nursing – “Have you ever served in the military” campaign

- www.haveyoueverserved.com
- http://wwwdeploymentpsych.org/
Screening Tools for Consistency

Questions specific to military experience can identify veterans at high risk for specific health problems related to MST, PTSD, depression, substance abuse, obesity.

1. Did you ever receive uninvited or unwanted sexual attention? (touching, cornering, pressure for sexual favor or inappropriate verbal remarks)

2. Did anyone ever use force or the threat of force to have sex with you against your will?
Increasing Knowledge of Community Providers

Training to align with veterans needs: Free online training modules for PTSD and other health care issues. Clinical, counseling and outreach community programs for veterans.

The National Center for PTSD: http://www.ptsd.va.gov/

Local Resources:
- Bend VA - Clinic
- Vet Center – Counseling
- COVO- Outreach
Questions ??

Cindi Warburton DNP | FNP-C
Bend, Or.
warburtoncindi@gmail.com
References


References


