

Women veterans and eating issues: A gap analysis

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TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Women Veterans and Eating Issues/Public Health Professionals

ABSTRACT: Background: Women veterans may have a high risk of developing eating disorders and eating issues as a result of their military service experiences. Such eating problems are associated with other diagnoses to which women veterans are more susceptible such as PTSD, MST, and depression. In addition, the diagnosis of obesity, coexisting with overeating problems, is becoming more prevalent for all Americans, especially veterans, both male and female. Treating this obesity epidemic with its resultant heart disease, diabetes and other conditions is enormously costly, both economically for society, and in quality of life for veterans.

Methods: A literature review and gap analysis regarding eating issues was conducted at a VA medical center.

Outcomes/Conclusions: Several quality improvement ideas for the care of veterans with suspected eating disorders resulted:

1. Establish screening procedures for particular patients using a standardized tool
2. Involve stakeholders
3. Establish an interdisciplinary Eating Disorder Team
4. Streamline referral system
5. Educate relevant personnel about eating disorder screening and referral procedures

A professional women's mental health work group is commencing efforts to address these recommendations.

Implications: Hopefully, by identifying and treating eating disorders more effectively in our women veteran population, some of the negative sequelae can be averted.

OBJECTIVE(S): The learner will be able to

- Analyze the reasons women veterans might be more at risk for eating disordered behaviors.
- Discuss three ways a health care organization could treat eating illnesses more effectively.

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