A Quality Improvement Project Using an Educational Outreach Program to Expand Access to Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care Services for Female Veterans

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Key Points: Distinction and Definition

- A soldier is not universally separated by gender.
- A veteran is identified and separated by gender.

Under federal law, a veteran is any person who
- served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States;
- served as a member of the reserves any time during a period of war or national emergency declared by the President or Congress; or
- was or is disabled and discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

Purpose

The purpose of the quality improvement project was to use an educational outreach program to increase female veterans’ knowledge of their eligibility for VA health care benefits, services provided, and locations, with the goal of increasing their likelihood to enroll in VA health care.

Background

- Passage of the 19th amendment granted women permanent status in the Regular and Reserve forces of all branches of the military in 1948. (Women in History, n.d.)
- Females account for approximately 3.7% of the 19.9 million veterans served by the VA, a number that includes male and female veterans. (VA, 2017)
- In 2010, only 67% of female veterans were enrolled in VA health care beneficiaries. (Harding, 2016)
- 2016, 6% of female veterans had been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. (Harding, 2016)
- 15% of veterans had been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. (Harding, 2016)

Aims

- Aim 1: Evaluate knowledge of female veterans before and after an educational program on eligibility for VA health care, available VA services, and VA service locations.
- Aim 2: Evaluate likelihood to enroll in VA health care services before and after the educational program.

Significance and Evidence

- Fastest-growing segment of the active duty military and veteran populations are females. (DIVA, 2015)
- Female veterans compared to male veterans and nonveterans increased suicide, homelessness, unemployment, unmet health care needs. (DIVA, 2015)
- USA is the nation’s largest integrated health care system, with over 1700 sites of care, but struggles to meet the health care needs of those who served, especially females. (DIVA, n.d.)
- Significant research to include systematic reviews of barriers to VA health care, gender-focused VA initiatives.

Translation, Dissemination, & Sustainability

- Publishing in journals and health/nursing newsletters.
- Sharing findings with vertical and horizontal stakeholders.
- Launching the first local female veterans’ town hall meeting.
- Serving in policy making to advocate for funded educational outreach projects to expand access.
- Encouraging use of evidence-based frameworks and theories to community programs (i.e. EBP and Knowledge).
- Maintaining and/or establishing partnerships with key stakeholders at local, state, and national levels.
- Participating in the Alabama State Nursing Association Leadership Academy to take project to the next level.
- Spearheading initiative to Operate A.C.E.S.S.S., (Access to VA health care in a Collaborative/Compassionate/Environment (Sails) in Sisterhood for female veterans.

Acknowledgements

Deborah S. Finell, D.N.S., PMHNP-BC, CAIN-AP, FAAN, John Merlo, F.A.C.N.E., Karl Hamer, Ph.D.