



FROM THE DIRECTOR

February is a month that prompts us to reach out to those we love and care about. This year, we are reminded of the integral power that communication and connection can play in our lives. Whether professionally or personally, effective communication is essential, particularly during times when “traditional” ways of connecting have been disrupted. This month’s newsletter explores various ways in which our Center is fostering connections with Veterans, especially those at-risk.

- Wilfred R. Pigeon, Ph.D.



RESEARCH DIVISION

Communicating with at-risk Veterans about suicide risk during transition from military service

CoE Co-Research Director, [Elizabeth Karras-Pilato, Ph.D.](#), was recently awarded a four-year IIR grant from VA’s Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) Service to develop communication strategies targeting Veterans in their first year post-discharge from the military. Messages will be tailored to increase treatment seeking among those Veterans at risk for suicide but hesitant to seek help. This is the first known clinical trial to examine the use of messaging to promote help seeking among any population at risk for suicide.

Initial session effects of brief CBT for Insomnia

Traditionally cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is delivered over six to eight sessions; however, researchers at the CoE examined [session by session effects of even briefer therapy](#). In a pilot clinical trial led by [Todd Bishop, Ph.D.](#), investigators measured the effects of a brief, four-session version of CBT-I (bCBTi) on both insomnia and depression. All Veteran participants (n=19) were enrolled in primary care and screened positive for insomnia and co-occurring PTSD and/or depression. Veterans received four, weekly, individualized sessions of bCBTi during which they provided self-report data on insomnia, depression and sleep parameters.

While changes in insomnia and depression severity between baseline and the beginning of session one were non-significant, statistically significant decreases were observed between sessions one to two and sessions two to three; without much change from either outcome between sessions three to four. These analyses reveal that the majority of treatment effects occurs over the first two bCBTi sessions. Findings suggest that brief interventions addressing insomnia may have a positive impact on both insomnia and co-occurring depression.



EDUCATION & DISSEMINATION DIVISION

Lethal means safety training for families and caregivers of at-risk Veterans

In December 2020, the [New York State Health Foundation](#) awarded a grant to CoE and VISN2 MIRECC investigators to expand the reach and further adapt the Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training model across New York State. CALM teaches health care providers strategies to reduce patients' access to lethal means during times of emotional crises.

Veterans account for one in seven suicides across New York State, with an increasing rate of suicide among New York's youngest Veterans, even as rates among older Veterans have declined. Although CALM is the gold standard for lethal means safety counseling, there is a need to expand the reach of CALM and further adapt it for nonclinical communities.

Under this grant, researchers aim to increase CALM's uptake among clinicians throughout the state as well as adapt CALM training to a Veteran family and caregiver audience. Researchers at various institutions, including the CoE, will conduct extensive outreach and engagement among clinical networks to educate clinicians on the importance of lethal means safety and how to integrate these trainings within their organizations. Additionally, focus groups with Veterans and their family members and/or caregivers will be conducted to obtain feedback about aspects of firearm safety, storage, suicide risk and communication. Findings will be used to tailor and deliver CALM to families and caregivers of Veterans in both online and in-person formats.

Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership Upcoming webinar offerings

The Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program continues to offer sessions as a part of its webinar series for clinicians and mental health professionals on college and university campuses. The aim of this series is to provide healthcare teams, college and university health professionals with knowledge and resources to help them meet the needs of student Veterans. Mark your calendars for our upcoming, free offerings:



TODAY, Wednesday, February 17, 2pm EST

"Fostering a Military Friendly Environment on Campus"

Presented by Lisa Chandler, LCSW, Colorado State University and Mark Elster, Georgia State University.

This presentation will provide attendees methods to identify and discuss challenges student Veterans face, best practices and proven ways to be a Military Friendly campus, and components of a Value-Add Model of working with student Veterans.

Wednesday, March 17, 2pm EST

"Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE): A Peer Support Program for Student Veterans"

Presented by Kali Lake, MSW, University of Michigan.

This session will provide an overview of a peer support program for student Veterans, different types of benefits student Veterans can receive from a peer support program, and effective ways that campuses are using these programs to reach student Veterans during the pandemic.

For more information, including registration, please visit the [CoE website](#) and/or subscribe to [VITAL's mailing list](#).