

Participation in PTSD Treatment: who starts, who stays and who drops out? (Michele Spont, PhD)

Approximately 1/3 of veterans newly diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) do not receive any mental health care. Among those who do participate in mental health care, only about half receive an adequate trial of treatment within the six months after the initial PTSD diagnosis. Because PTSD increases risks for poverty, unemployment, hospitalization, substance abuse, and chronic medical conditions, and because non-participation in mental health treatment contributes to chronicity, understanding the reasons for the lack of full treatment participation is crucial in order to alleviate the chronicity of the illness.

Dr. Spont and her research team have been funded by VA HSR&D to conduct a national survey study of over 12,000 veterans to find out why so many veterans do not get any care or do not get enough care. The surveys assess beliefs about PTSD and mental health treatment, perceived treatment needs, treatment preferences, and barriers to care. Six months after the veteran was initially surveyed, a second survey is being sent to assess participation in mental health treatment, efficacy of and satisfaction with treatment, and remaining treatment needs.

Although many studies have examined adherence rates to treatment for depression and other mental illnesses, no studies have examined treatment participation for those with PTSD. This study will fill in the gap in the PTSD treatment evidence base by ascertaining rates and extent of treatment participation among veterans for whom PTSD was recently identified as a problem. By using a patient-centered approach to understanding veterans' views of and experiences with PTSD treatment, specific targets in the PTSD treatment pathway amenable to intervention can be identified.