

Exploring Alternative PTSD Treatments

The VFW's Concern:

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), more than 40 percent of veterans in the VA system have a service-connected disability rating for mental health. The VFW acknowledges there is a growing need for alternative treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)/mental health conditions. Currently, veterans seeking mental health care are predominantly directed to two types of medications—selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs)—as well as various evidence-based therapies to reduce PTSD symptoms. Veterans have expressed to the VFW their concern that VA may be overprescribing these medications for mental health conditions. While today's standard treatments are successful for some individuals, many veterans report experiencing only temporary relief of symptoms, adverse side effects, and difficulties when going off medications.

Many veterans experience PTSD. If not properly treated, the effects can be detrimental in many ways including risk of homelessness, substance abuse, relationship problems, financial instability, difficulties in transitioning back to civilian life, or suicide. Veterans have shown a willingness to confront mental health challenges. Still, not all treatments work for all veterans, which is why the VFW is urging Congress and VA to research and provide alternative, non-conventional solutions for certain veterans. Some such treatments that have shown potential include stellate ganglion block, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, ketamine infusion, MDMA-assisted therapy, medical cannabis, and other plant-based alternative therapies.

VA has nearly 2.5 million veterans utilizing mental health care. No other health care network in America has as large a population of patients as VA. Given its resources and population size, it has the unique ability to lead from the front on mental health care and cutting-edge treatments. Congress must push VA to research and study innovative mental health solutions to not only help veterans seeking mental health care but also use this opportunity to push information to the private sector.

The VFW believes if there are additional treatments that can effectively treat PTSD, then VA should receive funding to research and deliver those treatments. Historically, VA has been a leader with other innovative treatments such as telemedicine, cardiovascular care, and prosthetics, and now has the opportunity to do the same regarding treatment of PTSD and other mental health conditions.

The VFW Urges Congress to:

Direct the Department of Defense and VA to implement innovative PTSD treatments currently used in the private sector.

Direct VA to review its current mental health treatments and prescribing practices to address the possible over reliance on pharmaceutical interventions.