



Veterans Mental Health and Substance Abuse

What we are getting right and What we are getting wrong

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Overview

- History of substance use disorder treatment in VA
- Why is the history of treatment in the VA important when taking care of Veterans.
- Different models of treatment and lack of uniformity
- The beginning of modern-day substance use treatment in VA
- Barriers to care
- Levels of substance use care
- Gaps in care

History of substance use disorder treatment in VA

- Post-Vietnam era substance treatment in VA.
- How substance use disorder treatment from DoD heavily influenced the VA's approach
 - This style of treatment continues in many places to this day.
- The historical view of Veterans with substance use disorder
- Few resources, wide geographical spread
- Criteria for admission
- Residential treatment vs Outpatient
- Abstinence only treatment

Transition to modern treatment

- The birth of motivational interviewing
- The slow rollout of motivational interviewing at the VA
- Motivational Interviewing became paired with harm reduction
 - DoD and VA approach to substance use had traditionally followed an abstinence only model
- Continued resistance to harm reduction and motivational interviewing for Veteran
- Why is harm reduction important for Veterans?

Modern treatment for Veterans

- Many Veterans with substance use issues also interacted with the DoD and have bad and sometimes traumatic memories of their interventions
- Levels of care in the VA
- Issues with Detox
- Substance use disorder being paired with a suicidal behavior is an important reasons to help Veterans stay engage at any cost.
- Being clear about your model of treatment, which values all goals in recovery can be important
- Forming partnerships with prescribing providers who can avail Veterans of medication assisted treatments
 - Suboxone
 - Naltrexone