

Patient Safety Advisory

Veterans Health Administration Warning System
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Item: Depression Screening for Veteran Patients Recently Separated from Active Military Duty

Specific Incident: A VA Medical Center reported an RCA Aggregated Review finding that: depression screening for recently separated Veterans may increase early identification of possible psychiatric problems and/or suicidality.

There are many approaches to trying to prevent suicide and parasuicide events applicable to any treatment setting (e.g., timely and effective screening, case management, targeted lithium use, intensive discharge planning and no-show follow-up, contraband searches, etc.)

While no single suicide screening approach is recommended for use within VA, there are many tools to choose from at our fingertips:

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) Clinical Guideline
http://vaww.oqp.med.va.gov/CPGintra/cpg/MDD/MDD_Base.htm

Suicide Screening Assessment Instruments (imbedded in the MDD Clinical Guideline)
http://vaww.oqp.med.va.gov/CPGintra/cpg/MDD/MDD_cpg/content/appendices/mdd_app1_fr.htm

Clinical Reminder Regarding Veterans of the Recent Conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (USH Information Letter 10 - 2004 – 001)
<http://vaww1.va.gov/environagents/docs/AfghanIL10200401.DOC>

Suggestions:

1. All clinical and administrative services that may be involved with treating recently separated veterans should review the current policy, or standard operating procedure (SOP) addressing depression or suicide prevention screening for Veterans recently separated from active military duty. (If this policy or SOP does not exist it should be developed.)
2. Refer to the websites, information letter and video identified in this advisory, then provide pertinent information to any and all interested inpatient and outpatient clinical and administrative services.
3. Ensure that discharge planning for patients treated for depression and/or suicidality includes information - - or direct referral, as needed - - to mental health services available in or near their home community (e.g., address, phone number, point of contact, fee arrangements, etc.).

Addl. Information: Additional information about working effectively with Veterans returning from combat is available on a satellite video recently produced by the Employee Education System: "Family and Community: Keys to Preventing Suicide" (August 31, 2004). This video features both VA and DoD experts (check your medical center library for a copy).

Source: VAMC Columbia MO and the VA National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS)

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