

APPENDIX

EXHIBIT G

Joint Amicus Brief Of Swords To Plowshares And Vietnam Veterans Of America



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Number of veterans seeking treatment for stress has doubled

Officials say statistics indicate growing awareness of symptoms

By Leo Shane III, Stars and Stripes

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WASHINGTON — The number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans getting treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder nearly doubled from fall 2005 to this summer, but officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs say that isn't necessarily bad news.

They believe the increase points to a growing awareness of the symptoms of PTSD and a larger willingness among young veterans to seek out help for the illness.

According to internal department data, the number of young veterans receiving PTSD treatment from VA hospitals and counseling centers rose from 20,394 patients in September 2005 to 38,144 patients in June 2006, an increase of 87 percent.

Hospital cases alone totaled 29,041 in June, up 82 percent from nine months earlier. The number of veterans who visited counseling centers more than doubled, from 4,467 to 9,103, over that same period.

Dr. Ira Katz, VA deputy chief of patient mental health services, said at least some of that increase is due to the increasing number of veterans: The number of troops who have separated from the service since September 2002 grew to 588,923 this summer, up more than 150,000 from the previous year.

Inevitably, any increase in veterans means more patients for the VA hospitals, he said.

But Alfonso Batres, chief officer for the department's readjustment services, says he thinks most of the jump in the number of cases is directly related to outreach efforts over the last few years.

Overall, the number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans visiting VA

centers for any type of counseling rose from 43,682 in September 2005 to 144,227 in June.

"We've really concentrated our efforts on reaching these troops," he said, "and now we're seeing more and more of them coming in to the counseling centers."

The VA has been emphasizing stress disorders and their symptoms through public campaigns and information given to troops before they leave the military.

Batres said that, in addition, for the last two years about 100 VA workers — all retired military personnel who served in Iraq and Afghanistan — have been stationed at demobilization sites overseas to talk about PTSD and veterans benefits for troops, to give them a better idea of what to expect after they leave the services.

"There is no one better to let [troops] know about that than their fellow peers," Batres said. "They're really getting the message out."

Batres also said the Defense Department's post-deployment mental health assessment, now repeated three to six months after troops return from combat tours overseas, has also greatly raised awareness of PTSD and its symptoms.

Both Katz and Batres said the department is working to add more counselors to its payroll to help deal with the increased workload, but they said the medical facilities are handling all of the current cases without significant problems.

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