

Military Personnel

What Do I Need to Know?

“Prescription drug abuse doubled among U.S. military personnel from 2002 to 2005 and almost tripled between 2005 and 2008” –National Institute of Drug Abuse*

Military administration and health care policy has created barriers to effective identification and treatment for opioid use disorder.

Why Am I Needed?

Active duty military personnel sustain physical injuries and emotional trauma in the line of duty and service to their country.

Prescribers typically use opioids for pain management and benzodiazepines for anxiety disorders, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Administered together, these two medications make for a dangerous combination as both slow respiration. Since coordinated communication among military, veterans affairs, and civilian healthcare systems is lacking, our military is put at high risk for developing a substance use disorder and may even suffer an overdose from prescription medications.

To complicate matters, a military lifestyle requires frequent transitions, including multiple health care sites due to transferring to a new base, moving back and forth from duty station to home in the case of reservists and National Guard, as well as when being discharged from active duty altogether. This makes it difficult to keep track of military personnel and their families' health care needs.

Hospital transitions are high risk events and entire programs, such as Team STEPPS (Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety) have been developed to attempt to decrease risk.** Completion of an outpatient program is hazardous for patients with significant medical conditions who take high risk medications.

Establishing lines of communication by building relationships through civilian-military coalition work will increase











awareness of the misuse/abuse/diversion/overdose threat to military forces and their families who are falling through the cracks of these types of frequent transitions.

Operation OpioidSafe is a pilot overdose prevention education and rescue naloxone program based in Ft. Bragg, Fayetteville, North Carolina. Prescription drug overdose fatalities among active duty soldiers is an increasingly prominent problem that requires a comprehensive response. Operated from the Pain Management Clinic at Womack Army Medical Center for the Warrior Transition Brigade, this first in the nation program incorporates prevention and treatment elements of national guidelines on: proper opioid prescribing (including use of pain contracts and patient monitoring), patient and peer education (including training barracks officers and families of enlisted soldiers), substance abuse treatment referral (including buprenorphine detoxification as needed for patients completing opioid therapy for pain), and naloxone provision (intranasal kits dispensed from hospital pharmacy at Ft. Bragg with DVD-based education). The pilot program has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ft. Bragg.



What Needs To Be Done?



-  Establish comprehensive lines of communication between military and civilian medical providers.
-  As military personnel are at risk of misusing prescription medications due to Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other emotional health issues, routine universal screening for prescription medication, alcohol, and illicit drug misuse by a physician is strongly recommended.
-  Invest in developing alternative and holistic approaches to treatment for trauma and pain.
-  Keep a list of local treatment providers as referral sources of additional support and specialized treatment for military personnel.
-  Improve the health of our military forces and decrease adverse events through early detection, prevention, and intervention, which will improve patient satisfaction and save on overall healthcare costs.
-  Avoid practitioners who prescribe without proper supervision and training for the treatment of pain.
-  Know the signs and symptoms of misuse/abuse/diversion/overdose from prescription medications.
-  Understand harm reduction, in the form of naloxone rescue kits, for those who have been struggling with an opioid addiction and include loved ones in education and training programs.
-  Have military police adopt the use of permanent pill drop containers on base to send the message of the importance of safe medications practices.
-  ***Take Correctly, Store Securely, Dispose Properly, Never Share.™***

Resources

If you feel that you have a problem with prescription medication, alcohol, or illicit drugs you can call the military Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-342-9647 and speak with a counselor who can direct you toward resources specific to your branch of the military.

www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/operation-opioidsafe-rescues-wounded-soldiers-from-prescription-drug-addiction-179131531.html

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeMZ511yDFY&feature=player_embedded

For more information
visit
projectlazarus.org
or call
+1.336.667.8100



* Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/topics-in-brief/substance-abuse-among-military-veterans-their-families>

** Retrieved from <http://teamstepps.ahrq.gov/>