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Mental Health and Wellbeing amongst Military Personnel

This leaflet contains information and sources available in order to support army personnel and their families regarding mental health and wellbeing issues.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is defined as ‘a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community’ (WHO, 2014).

Additional Charities available to Support Army Personnel

- ◇ Ssafa the Armed Forces Charity. Helpline 08007314880. (ssafa the Armed Forces Charity, No Date).
- ◇ British Legion. Helpline: 08088028080. (British Legion, No Date).

Statistics

In 2018 there is a total of 147,000 personnel between the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. (Armed Forces, 2018). Among the UK Armed Forces, mental health disorders have increased by 78% in the last eight years. The number of conditions diagnosed by mental health services has risen from 1.8 per cent in 2007/8 to 3.2 per cent in 2015/16. (Independent, 2016). This meaning that mental health and wellbeing is a rising problem of concern within the Armed Forces.

Sources of Support Available

The Army provides healthcare support and services to you and your dependants if you are based in the UK or overseas. The Army 'recognise mental health illness, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as a serious and disabling medical condition but one which can be treated' (Army Be the Best. 2018). This meaning the Army do not only provide mental health support for you as army personnel but also for your families.

This is because families can also suffer when personnel are overseas, or if an injury occurred. The lives of families get affected when an individual joins the armed forces.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) Medical Service have aimed to improve the mental health services available to those serving in the armed forces. They have applied new methods including deploying qualified mental health professionals to the front line in order to ensure that briefing on the support available, assessment and treatment is available to every serviceman or woman. These methods are available before and after deployment. (GOV.UK, 2016).

The improvements made have resulted in a positive outcome regarding stress management being included in mental health awareness training, caring leadership and effective management skills becoming a priority. The British Army are aiming to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and instead, raise awareness of the medical care and support available.

If army personnel are concerned about having a mental health condition, they can ask for advice or support from any medical officer or their chain of command. This will allow personnel to either be treated for mental health problems by their medical officer or if the severity is worse they would be referred to specialist mental health services. (GOV.UK, 2016).

'Specialist mental health services are primarily delivered through 16 military Departments of Community Mental Health (DCMHs) located in large military centres across the UK , as well as centres overseas' (Gov.UK, 2016). DCMHs located in the UK offer support from psychiatrists, mental health nurses, clinical psychologists and mental health social workers. These are all available in order to provide effective support and treatment to enhance an individual's mental health and wellbeing. (Gov.UK, 2016).

In the UK, veteran's families receive healthcare from the NHS.

'Mental health care is a multiagency delivery effort and the MOD and UK Department of Health are working with the NHS and service charities including combat stress, to promote awareness of veterans' and the service family issues' (GOV.UK, 2016).

Help For Heroes

Help for Heroes Hidden Wounds is another charity that provides free and confidential support to veterans and the additional family members who suffer with anxiety, depression, stress, anger or alcohol and drug misuse. (Help for Heroes, No Date).

If Army personnel are struggling with mental health, Help for Heroes Psychological Wellbeing team is available to listen and support. Many of the services are free of charge and a confidential service is available. Help for heroes many services include:

- ◇ Hidden Wounds Psychological service. This service is available nationally and is aimed at veterans and family members. The service is available through phone calls, skype or face to face.
- ◇ Psycho– educational courses are available for veterans and their families.
- ◇ Mental health support is available.
- ◇ Psychological and Wellbeing team members are available at all Recovery Centres. (Help For Heroes, No Date).

Combat Stress

Combat stress is another charity offering services to improve veteran’s mental health. They have many methods of how they can provide support such as, treatment programmes, helpline's, workshops within communities, treatment centres, peer support, substance misuse and veterans getaway’s. (Combat stress, No Date).

Combat stress provide a range of treatment programmes, therapies and support to help with mental health problems and promote wellbeing. An individual could attend a group workshop or an individual session with a community team. (Combat Stress, No Date).

The charity offers trauma-focused therapy through a six-week residential treatment programme. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is used as part of the treatment. In order to help to live day to day life the charity runs stabilisation programmes.

The programme is made personally for each individual and looks at their symptoms and current medication. (Combat Stress, No Date).

The helpline is available to individuals currently serving or have previously served in the UK Armed Forces. It is also available to family members or carers who are concerned about a loved one. The service is available 24 hours for people feeling depressed, have flashbacks, have anxiety and much more. (Combat Stress, No Date).

Methods of Support

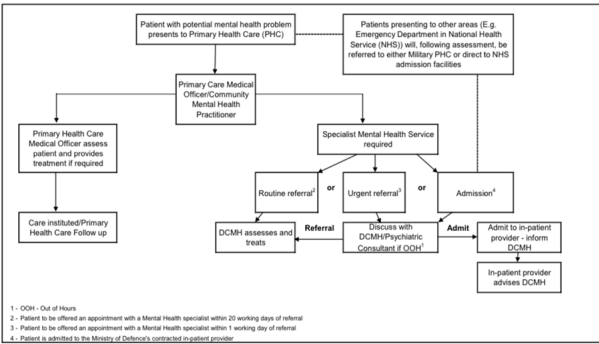


Figure.1 Pathway in to Mental Health Services (MOD, 2017)

The level of care a patient receives is determined by many factors such as, the severity of their symptoms and the degree of risk.

Figure 1 shows the variety of pathways into mental health services in the Armed Forces. The diagram does not show the process of care for every veteran, as people with less severe cases could be treated wholly within the primary care setting such as their GP or medical officer. (Ministry of Defence, 2017).

There are three levels of care available to veterans which are, primary health care, care in the community through specialists in the military department of community mental health and in hospitals. The hospital care can be provided within NHS hospitals or the contracted In-Patients Service Provider. (Ministry of Defence, 2017)

The Defence of People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022

The Defence of People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022 has been developed to incorporate all defence people, recognizing the opportunity to make positive impact on the groups not covered in the 2011 publication. These groups include Reserve veterans and the MOD civil servants and their families. (MOD, 2017).

The MOD aims to maintain the health and wellbeing of the personnel, primarily to deliver and support military effect. This ensures that personnel can deploy on operations and be fully focused in their day to day role. 'The MOD must also meet the commitment for the Armed Forces Covenant, ensuring that Armed Forces personnel and their families are not disadvantaged within wider society, either during their time in service or in their lives beyond the military' (MOD, 2017)

The World Health Organization identifies three core determinants of health; the social and economic characteristics and behaviours' (MOD, 2017).

The MOD has the chance to influence these determinants of health across the population. All personnel are provided with housing, welfare services and stable employment for themselves and their families. (MOD, 2017).

Armed Forces Personnel undertake many dangerous duties, with the risk of exposure to severely traumatic life-threatening situations. The stress linked to being deployed and the return home are seen as risk factors for Armed Forces personnel. However, research has shown that on the ground-based deployment, it suggests that mental health during operational deployment is mainly reported as good. It is stated that there tends to be a higher percentage of poorer mental health among deployed reserve personnel compared to regular personnel. (MOD, 2017).

Mental Health Steering Groups concentrate on aspects of physical and mental wellbeing, with a focus on healthy lifestyles, the prevention of physical injury and prevention of physical and mental illness.

There are four groups mainly focused on by the Mental Health Steering Group. These are stigma reduction, occupational stress, suicide and self-harm and culture and behaviours. It has seen an unprecedented time of sustained mental health related activity over the previous six years. (MOD, 2017).

Theory

Military employment has an effect on family members as well as the military personnel. The role can be stressful on military personnel, their partners and children. 'Research shows deployment is linked to increased partner stress, experiences of secondary trauma for the partner and children decreased academic performance and increased behavioural health issues for children' (Clark, O'Neal, Conley, and Manicini, 2017).

Progress has been made in order to develop comprehensive theoretical approaches that consider the whole family and how

relationships and processes surrounding deployment link to one and another over time. Family attachment network is a framework aimed to understand factors during and after deployment that has an effect on the families' wellbeing. The network recognises many stages regarding deployment. Another approach of the framework is that it recognises that deployment causes stress and disorganization to family systems. (Clark, O'Neal, Conley, and Manicini, 2017).

Wellbeing is assessed in two perspectives which are affective and cognitive. State of anxiety and personal wellbeing is examined. Wellbeing can apply to certain aspects of life, and certain aspects are assessed that are relevant to each family member. The framework also examines parental guilt, because having a parent away from home can affect relationships between parents and children. This is also a common emotion felt by deployed service members with children and partners. (Clark, O'Neal, Conley, and Manicini, 2017).

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