PTSD, Moral Injury and Spiritual Care at the End of Life

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CHAPCA Annual Meeting  October 6, 2012

Objectives

• Name 3 symptoms of PTSD and 3 characteristics of moral injury.

• Describe two spiritual care interventions for veterans who wish to speak of their combat experience
Military Culture Characteristics

- Combat or non-combat experience
- POWs
- War or era they served: WW2; Cold War; Korean conflict; Viet Nam; Gulf War; OEF/OIF/OND
- Branch of service & rank (Special Forces-Green Berets, Navy Seals; intelligence
- Enlisted or drafted
- Family history of serving/geographical background
- PTSD Note: Most soldiers are able to integrate their military experience into their lives as naturally resilient people. The VA is studying this group in depth.

What do you know about PTSD?
PTSD Definition

History of exposure to a traumatic event that meets two criteria

1. Experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others.
2. Response involved intense fear, helplessness or horror.

AND

Symptoms from each of these three symptom clusters

- Intrusive recollections
- Avoidant/numbing symptoms
- Hyper-arousal symptoms

DSM IV Criteria http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional

What do you know about moral injury?
Are PTSD and Moral Injury recent concepts?

Definition of Moral Injury is evolving

“Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.” (Litz, et al 2009)

“. . . the key precondition for moral injury is an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life, and so forth.” (Maguen, et al 2011)
What do you know about Spiritual Care at end of life?

End of Life
Spiritual Care Areas to Consider

• Life review
• Ministry of presence
• Active listening
• Explore beliefs and values
• Others you might include?
Is Spiritual Care at end of life different for Veterans and Non-Veterans?

Categories of Spiritual Distress

Spiritual Pain: Why is this happening to me?
  What does all of this mean? God doesn’t seem to be listening.

Spiritual Alienation: God just seems so far away.
  Where is God when I need God most?
  I don’t need any help from God, I can do it myself.

Spiritual Anxiety: I think God is punishing me. Why else would I have this cancer?
  I’ve been so far from God, I don’t think God’s going to help me now.
  I’m afraid of dying.

Spiritual Guilt – Moral Injury: I should have lived my life better.
  I don’t think God is very pleased with me; I haven’t led a “good” life.
  I have killed human beings and that is wrong.

Spiritual Anger: I want nothing to do with God. God has nothing to offer.
  If God is good and loving, why is God allowing this to happen?

Spiritual Despair: What hope do I have? God doesn’t care.
  I stopped praying. God is not listening.

Spiritual Loss: I don’t think God loves me.
  I don’t feel God’s love anymore.
Normal questions about military service (what/when/where) can elicit a story indicating PTSD or Moral Injury. Be prepared.

Stories we have heard

- A WWII Purple Heart recipient
- A Korean War Purple Heart recipient
- A Korean War Vet
- A Corpsman in Vietnam
Addressing the Objectives

• Name 3 symptoms of PTSD and 3 characteristics of moral injury.

• Describe two spiritual care interventions for veterans who wish to speak of their combat experience.
Why have these end of life conversations?

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