

Suicide Among Veterans: Alarming Statistics

Veteran Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric K. Shinseki, stated at a VA-sponsored suicide prevention conference held in January 2010, that 20 percent of the more than 30,000 people who commit suicide nationwide each year are veterans. Approximately 18 veterans end their own lives every day and everyone is susceptible, Shinseki continued by stating that emotional wounds are no less common than physical injuries however, they are more difficult to diagnose which adds to the challenge of suicide prevention.

All returning veterans face difficult challenges as they readjust to civilian life on a daily basis. However, veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars face additional challenges due to the duration of the wars and multiple tours of duty. A number of them suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is a predisposing factor of suicide. Over 90 percent of persons that commit suicide have a mental health disorder that is both diagnosable and treatable; in many cases it is linked to depression or substance abuse. Some of the risk factors include:

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Relationship problems
- Financial difficulties
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Depression (ongoing)
- Social isolation
- Mental health issues
- Recent illness and/or hospitalization
- Difficulty sleeping
- Access to firearms

In response to the alarming statistics, the Department of Veteran Affairs has established 24/7 help lines that are readily available, hired thousands of additional health-care professionals including counselors, many of which are dedicated exclusively to suicide prevention research and counseling. All threats, statements and thoughts of suicide should be taken seriously. Initiating conversation by expressing concern and offering to help can save a life. Contacting someone that can listen and provide guidance can mean the difference between life and death. The number for the Veterans Crisis Line is 1-800-273-8255 and their website address is www.VeteransCrisisLine.net.

Ellen P. Embrey, Assistant Defense Secretary for Health Affairs, believes that supplying people with information about the multiple prevention resources is a crucial aspect of suicide prevention. She stated that the armed services are addressing prevention increased awareness and sensitivity regarding warning signs and by developing education and services that will be in place throughout a service member's career. "Every life lost to suicide is both a personal tragedy and a tragedy to society, whether civilian or military," she stated. "It's also a tragedy because, for all of our sophisticated knowledge, we still do not know all there is to know about preventing these needless deaths from occurring."

Although action is being taken to help enlisted personnel and returning veterans, it's a case of too little, too late especially for the families and friends of those who lives have been lost to suicide. Considering governmental red tape and the slow movement of any government process, we, as caring citizens need to pressure the bureaucratic agencies to ensure that they put their words into action. Every life is precious and priceless.