TREATMENT OF PTSD IN WOMEN VETERANS

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• **Mission:** To promote the best clinical care and functional status of Veterans through research, education, and training related to the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders

• 7 Divisions with unique areas of expertise, from neurobiology to dissemination and training

• [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)
PTSD Diagnostic Criteria

- Exposure to a traumatic event in which the person:
  - Experienced, witnessed, or was confronted by death or serious injury to self or others
- Severe and persistent symptoms
  - Re-experiencing, avoidance/numbing, & hyperarousal
  - Last >1 month
  - Cause clinically significant distress or impaired functioning

PTSD is associated with increased likelihood of other psychiatric disorders, functional difficulties, reduced quality of life, and poor physical health
Why focus on treating PTSD in Women Veterans?
The Number of Women Who Use VA Healthcare is Growing

- In FY 2011, **6.1%** of the 5,372,354 Veterans who used VA healthcare were women (328,449 of total)
- **12.6%** of the 408,142 OIF/OEF/OND Veterans who used VA care were women (51,256 of total)

Source: PTSD Fact Sheet, FY 2011, Northeast Program Evaluation Center
PTSD is a Significant Concern for Women and Women Veterans

12-Month PTSD in US Adults

- **Men:** 1.8%
- **Women:** 5.2%

FY 2011 PTSD in VA Patients

- **Men:**
  - OEF/OIF/OND: 25.2%
  - All Eras: 8.7%
- **Women:**
  - OEF/OIF/OND: 18.9%
  - All Eras: 11.6%

Source: [http://www.hcp.med.harvard.edu/ncs/](http://www.hcp.med.harvard.edu/ncs/) (left); PTSD Fact Sheet, FY 2011, Northeast Program Evaluation Center (right)
Context for the Study in 2000

- Gap between evidence and practice
  - Best evidence for cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), but most VA therapists were not trained in CBT and used other techniques
- Chose to study *Prolonged Exposure*, despite concerns that:
  - VA patients could not tolerate exposure
  - VA therapists could not deliver exposure
- No prior randomized clinical trials of PTSD treatment in Women Veterans
  - CSP #494: 1\textsuperscript{st} VA Cooperative Study focused exclusively on women
Key Information About Study Participants

- 284 women: 277 Veterans and 7 Army Soldiers
- Average age was mid-40s (range = 22 to 78)
- Almost half were ethnic or racial minorities
- 4 out of 5 had at least one other current psychiatric disorder
- Exposure to multiple types of trauma was common
  - 9 out of 10 had experienced sexual trauma
  - Almost 25% had experienced combat
Key Information About Study Therapists and Training

- 54 female therapists
  - Mostly psychologists; some social workers, advanced practice nurses, and psychiatrists
  - Few were experts in exposure therapy or CBT
- Training consisted of initial face-to-face workshops followed by 1-2 practice cases
- All treatment sessions were videotaped for review by remote supervisors
  - Supervision provided by telephone during the study
PTSD Improved More in Prolonged Exposure than in Comparison Treatment

PTSD Symptom Severity

Women who received Prolonged Exposure were:

- 1.8 times as likely to no longer have PTSD
- 2.4 times as likely to experience complete remission

Overall $d = .27^{*}$

* $p < .05$
Implications for VA Healthcare

- VA patients can benefit from Prolonged Exposure
- VA therapists can be trained to deliver Prolonged Exposure
VA is A Natural Translational Research Environment
Rollout of Evidence-Based Psychotherapy for PTSD

- VHA is implementing rollouts of Prolonged Exposure therapy (PE) and Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) – two evidence-based treatments for PTSD
- PE and CPT are recommended in the 2010 VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for PTSD at the highest level
  - Efficacy of these therapies confirmed by the Institute of Medicine (2008)
- VHA has provided training to over 4,400 VA mental health staff in the delivery of PE and/or CPT
- All medical centers currently provide PE or CPT, and almost all provide both therapies
My Future Research

We have effective treatments for PTSD, but:

• How do we promote the fullest recovery and restore quality of life?
• What works for which patients?
  – Currently planning VA Cooperative Study #591, a comparative effectiveness study to identify optimal strategies for individual patients