

Veterans Alternative Health Programs

By Lori Kelsey RN DOM

The Department of Veteran's Affairs (DVA) is one of the biggest researchers, and supporters of alternative non-drug therapies for pain management, and mental health. The DVA ranks the evidence as "good quality" that non-drug therapies may be helpful in the management of acute or chronic posttraumatic spectrum disorders (PTSD), post-traumatic brain injury (PTBI) and more. Many Veterans are not aware of the alternative health programs available to them, nor what these programs entail. Here are some programs & protocols promoted by the DVA:

The DVA partners with the Healing Warriors Program, a non-profit advocate for non-drug treatment of stress/distress, and PTSD. Service members, their partners, and parents receive 3 free treatments each, then at a subsidized rate of \$35 per hour. Treatments consist of Acupuncture, Cranio-sacral therapy, and a Healing Touch/Guided Imagery protocol that is in accordance with the "*Healing Touch with Guided Imagery for PTSD in Returning Active Duty Military; A Randomized Controlled Trial*". The Healing Trauma Guided Imagery CD, and the Relaxation & Wellness Meditation CD supplement these hands on therapies.

The Healing Warriors program also sponsors volunteerships, and a 3-month Healing Touch internship. Healing Warriors clinic is based in Fort Collins Colorado, but is launching outreach clinics in Colorado Springs. Hopefully, based on the response and requests, they will consider launching similar access to their program in northern New Mexico. Call 970-776-VETS (8387) or visit www.healingwarriorsprogram.org.

The Helms Medical Institute (HMI) Trauma Protocol was developed for service men and women experiencing posttraumatic stress & distress. It uses 6 ear acupuncture points that affect the brain (limbic system, prefrontal cortex, HPA-axis, and parasympathetic nervous system). The points help regulate memory & concentration, and encoding & retention of emotional experiences. They assist with reducing compulsive behavior; over vigilance & arousal; irritability, anger, fear & aggression (Helms et al, 2011). They help individuals maintain decision-making ability, and sense of calm & safety (Helms et al, 2011).

The Battlefield Acupuncture (BFA) Protocols were developed by Dr. Richard Niemtow MD for use in combat zones, and they now benefit civilians. The BFA Pain Protocol was developed for acute pain management. The 5 ear points are stimulated with acupuncture in a sequence until pain reduction/ relief is achieved, then acupuncture is retained for 5 to 30 minutes. The BFA Headache Protocol uses 4 ear points with acupuncture retained for 20 to 30 minutes. According to the clinical experiences, the BFA Pain Protocol works between 80-90% of the time, and the BFA Headache Protocol 80% of the time (for many types of headaches).

The National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) AcuDetox ear protocol supports drug & alcohol abstinence and harm reduction. It is not part of the DVA per se, but is a well researched and established protocol for in-patient and out-patient acute detox and rehabilitation. For more information and a list of statewide free or low cost locations for AcuDetox in New Mexico, contact Public Health Acupuncture of NM at (505) 232-7654 or phaofnm@gmail.com. *More on AcuDetox in a future article.*

The DVA PC3 & VCP programs enable Vets to receive Primary Care from local providers if they live many miles from their nearest VA clinic or hospital. *This benefit includes acupuncture.* The PC3 / Patient-Centered Care program uses in-network acupuncturists. The VCP/ Veterans Choice Program uses in-network & non-network acupuncturists as part of PC3. No referral is needed, there is never a co-pay, enough treatments are authorized to address a health complaint, and there is no yearly limit on visits. Prior authorization is simple by calling the number on the back of the VA Choice Card (886-284-3743), or visit www.triwest.com.