contact
Collaborating for Military Mental Health

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ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

VETERANS QUALITY NETWORK FOR VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Issue 04, August 2023

This Issue

WELCOME

Welcome to our 4th issue of the Quality Network for Veterans Mental Health Services newsletter! As always, we are very pleased to be sharing a range of articles covering different themes and areas of best practice from our member services. We hope these newsletters serve as a useful way for our members to showcase their brilliant work and for others to gain some knowledge and insight into how other services operate. This newsletter covers articles on the importance of space dedicated to address various challenges veterans face daily, updates on how Project-100 is going and the significance of specialised educational institutions for veterans.

This year we hosted our third annual forum for the network and it took place online in July. We were so delighted to see so many of you attend this event, as it is the biggest event of the year for us. We use our annual forums to bring together staff working across different member services, as well as veterans and carers, to join in on a day full of shared learning and highlighting what the findings have been from our peer review visits for the cycle. This year we had a fantastic programme of speakers and we are pleased to share some highlights of the forum with you on page 10-11. It is with great pleasure that we will be hosting our next annual forum in person, at the Royal College of Psychiatrists' London venue. We will be sharing more details for this in the coming months!

This year we have continued to support our member services undergoing either their developmental or accreditation review pathway, with a view to provide some recommendations on areas for improvement and also to recognise all the hard work that teams are doing. We will soon be sharing our third aggregated report for the network which will be demonstrating our findings from the peer reviews we have completed so far. We hope this will serve to be a useful resource for our current members for benchmarking purposes, but also for potential new members to learn about what the process involves and some of the benefits to take away from it.

We hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter – if you would like to be featured in future newsletters, please do not hesitate to get in touch!

Jemini Jethwa, Programme Manager

Development of a 'One-Stop Veterans Hub'

Joanne Lawson, Occupational Therapist, Op Courage and ***Kathryn Guy***, Occupational Therapist, Help for Heroes

Background

Veterans are at a higher risk of mental health issues compared to the general population due to the unique stressors they experience during their military service. These stressors may include combat exposure, separation from family and loved ones, and the challenge of transitioning back to civilian life. (Vaughan-Horrocks et al, 2021)

Veterans face a range of mental health challenges due to their military service, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. There are several treatment options available, including therapy, medication, and community -based support. However, there are also challenges associated with providing mental health care to veterans, including stigma and a shortage of mental health professionals. Addressing these challenges and providing effective mental health care for veterans is crucial to improving their overall health and wellbeing. Issues that need to be considered are their physical injuries, financial difficulties, and social isolation.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic there was a reduction in physical spaces where veterans could get support in the South West of England for their physical and mental health. Much of the support was moving online with local centres closing. Many veterans were identifying lack of connectivity as a barrier to wellness. At appointments with veterans on our caseloads there were lots of discussions regarding the concept of a one stop shop for veterans and that they knew lots of people who would benefit from this if available. UK military charities suggests that loneliness and social isolation are prevalent for veterans of all ages (Wilson M, Kiernan, 2018). Often the main challenge with seeking support is the stigma veterans feel. They can be embarrassed or ashamed in needing to seek help for invisible health issues including their mental health and invisible disabilities which can prevent them from accessing the care they need.

What we did about it

Over the past three years local links with charities and the public sector have been developing and it was identified that we were working with many of the same struggling veterans. Help for Heroes started a face-to-face space once a month. This was within a military setting with increased security. It was not ideal for the group of veterans we wanted to target. Discussions within the Op Courage team lead to the group being offered the use of Bedminster Cricket Club once a month. In July 2022 the first 'Veterans Hub' was held.

Creating a good therapeutic space involves creating an environment that is safe, confidential, comfortable, calming, empathetic, open, and trustworthy thus supporting positive participation (Harrison et al., 2015). The cricket club location worked because it is a neutral space, has plenty of parking, is on a bus route, has a large accessible outside green space with a wall of French doors, there are quiet confidential areas and access to a kitchen.

The large space allows many organisations to come together in one area so the veterans can come to one place to get support from many statutory and charity organisations.

Collaborative working in mental health is crucial because it recognises that mental health issues are complex and

multidimensional. A collaborative approach ensures that individuals receive a comprehensive assessment and treatment plan that considers their physical, psychological, and social needs. This approach is particularly important in the treatment of individuals with severe and persistent mental health conditions, who often require support from a range of professionals. Collaborative working also improves communication between professionals and enhances the sharing of information. This improves the quality of care provided and reduces the risk of errors or omissions.

Regular attenders at the Hub are Help for Heroes, Op Courage, Department of Work and Pensions, Bristol City Council, VetsUK, Royal British Legion, The Poppy Factory, Forces Employment Charity, Models for Heroes, RAFA, Filton Pétanque, Bristol Bears Rugby and Armed Forces Breakfast Clubs.

We have a veteran who acts as a meet and greet, asks the visitors to sign in, makes them a welcoming drink and introduces them to other veterans or the profession/organisation they have come to visit.

Developments:

- Publicity- currently the poster inviting veterans to the hub is distributed via social media and organisations websites. There is a plan to link the poster to up to date information via a QR code. There is a plan to get these new posters distributed widely – on the buses, in GP surgeries and sports centres.
- It has been requested by veterans that the traditional bacon and egg banjo be available. A rota is being drawn up for kitchen duties.

Benefits, expected and unexpected:

- Informal supervision for the staff who are all working from home in isolation, seeing colleagues face-to-face.
- A reflective space for discussion between professional group.
- Increased knowledge and links of the resources available for the veterans.
- Staff link in with each other between hubs to explore options available for veterans.
- Meeting veterans face-to-face who have been seen online only.
- Having had an initial face-to-face meeting with organisations they are then able to access support on line, thus increasing the staff output as reducing travel for subsequent appointments.
- A one stop shop for the veterans - at least 90 % of the veterans see more than one provider when they attend the Hub.
- Well behaved dogs are attending. Staff dogs have provided a grounding activity function for some dysregulated veterans.
- Peer support and introductions for veterans.
- Access to the outside, walking around the large green space, having difficult conversations side-by-side, de-escalation when veterans are stressed or overwhelmed.
- Partners and families are welcomed and supported by staff. They can sit in with appointments and have their own confidential support as well.

The Veterans Hub has been such a success in Bristol that one has started in Gloucester at the Kingsholm Rugby Ground (Second Wednesday of the month), Swindon (Last Monday of the month) and Plymouth. Help for Heroes are keen to get them started around the country.

References available upon request

PTSD Resolution Project-100 15 months on

Bill Andrews, Project-100 Coordinator, PTSD Resolution

In the 3rd issue of this newsletter, we looked at the early findings from Project-100, based on the first six months. Here, 15 months on, we take a look at some of the emerging results and associated issues, with a take-home message from our investigation.

Setting the work in context
We were very grateful to see the official publication of the NICE Guidelines Real-World Evidence Framework (here) in June 2022. This offers an approach to a different sort of complementary evidence provision that fits well with service evaluations like Project-100.

Comparison with IAPT data
An important part of our protocol is to investigate how the outcomes compare to the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) data, and, in particular, the data relating to veterans and their dependents that are treated by IAPT. These can be found here. This is important because IAPT is predicated on the delivery of NICE approved evidence-based treatments. The ability to demonstrate equivalence where our Project-100 outcomes approximate those of IAPT for veterans would be very encouraging.

The devil is in the detail
We commissioned a report within our Pragmatic Tracker software that would allow us to be able to extract our data whenever we wish. The table below shows up-to-date results for closed clients in the first 15 months, from April 1st 2022 to June 30th 2023.

The yellow highlight relates to the recovery rate, the blue the improvement rate. The stated IAPT target for recovery is 50% for the combination of both GAD-7 and PHQ-9. (For a full explanation of how these figures are calculated please refer to our interim report here, which has the published data on the first 12 months.)

But, when we looked at the published IAPT data (see figure 1), freely available to all here, we noticed higher attrition rates than in our data.

Measure	GAD -7	%	PHQ-9 -c	%	Both	%
First Appt	189		187		187	
Later Appts	180	95.24%	176	94.12%	176	94.12%
Cases	161	89.44%	142	80.68%	163	92.61%
Recovered	90	55.90%	73	51.41%	81	49.69%
Reliably Recovered	88	54.66%	66	46.48%	78	47.85%
Reliably Improved	122	67.78%	93	52.84%	128	72.73%
No Reliable Change	49	27.22%	82	46.59%	40	22.73%

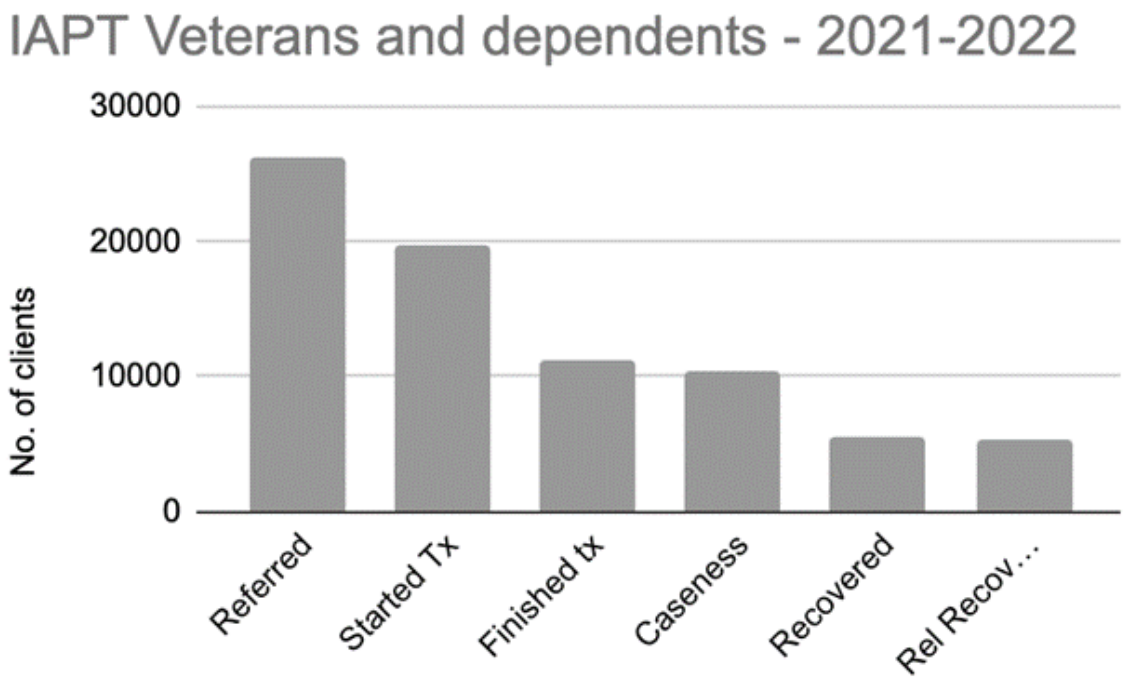
Table 1 - Case report Project-100 July 1, 2023 (All closed cases)

Figure 1 Key information about Veterans and dependents treated in IAPT 2021-2022

Key activity		Outcome measures
England ex-British Armed Forces or Dependants Referrals received 26,179 Referrals accessing services 19,800 Referrals finished treatment 11,129 of those finishing a course of treatment, number of referrals where; Accessing IAPT services within 6 weeks 8,281 Accessing IAPT services within 18 weeks 8,915	The % recovery rates etc. are based on using the 'Referrals finished treatment' as the denominator. This improves the apparent outcome scores but offers no explanation for the high attrition scores	**England ex-British Armed Forces or Dependants** Recovery Rate 52.9 Reliable Recovery Rate 50.2 Reliable Improvement Rate 68.4 No Reliable Change Rate 24.3 Reliable Deterioration Rate 5.5

Representing these percentages as actual numbers (figure 2 below) clearly demonstrates the attrition rates from referral to completed treatment.

Figure 2 IAPT Veterans outcomes data expressed in numbers



References available upon request

Changing the denominator

The profiling of a service may be looked upon through the lens of outcomes based on referral rather than based on completed treatments. This would provide a more accurate picture of the acceptability of treatment for those referred and a more realistic and transparent picture regarding the true numbers of those who are benefiting from treatment as a proportion of those referred

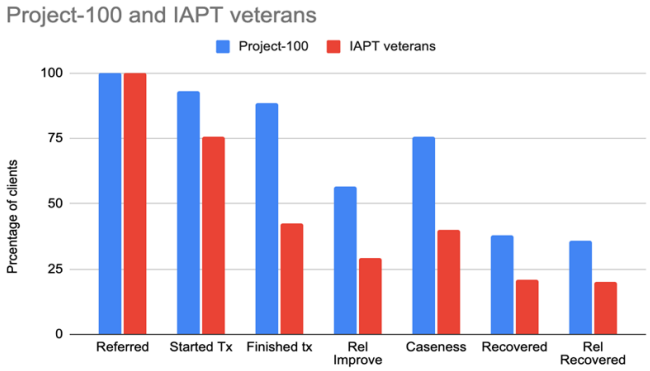


Figure 3 Outcomes based on percentage of referral; Project-100 (15 months; April 1st 2022-June 30th 2023) & IAPT veterans (12 months; 2021 to 2022)

Looking at the data in this way the picture tells a different story, as seen in figure 3. The reliable improvement, recovery and reliable recovery rates for Project-100 clients expressed as a percentage of those referred looks very encouraging, with lower attrition rates and a higher number of clients attending at least 2 treatment sessions.

A call for a 'lingua franca' around definitions

In order to make sensible comparisons we need to be able to compare apples with apples.

In IAPT perhaps it may be unfair to base rates of change on referrals because of how referrals are defined. For us at PTSD Resolution we define a referral as a client who has made an enquiry and completed the registration process with us. We accept all referrals, with no exclusion criteria, other than the insistence on sobriety (or not under the influence of recreational drugs) at the time of treatment.

IAPT may have many reasons why clients fail to progress from referral to starting treatment. However, IAPT data also reveals high attrition from commencing treatment to completing treatment. In contrast, PTSD Resolution clients tend to stay in treatment, with, in fact, 95% of clients who saw a therapist once returning for at least one more session and 78% of referrals who completed registration staying to an agreed planned ending.

Our take-home message

The lower attrition rates in Project-100 compared to IAPT warrants further investigation but it's clearly the case that there's scope for services offered by charities such as PTSD Resolution, where we clearly demonstrate outcomes equivalent to IAPT, to plug the IAPT attrition gap.

With just over 11,000 veterans managing to attend more than one treatment session out of a referral base of over 26,000 there's clearly a great need that's not being met. We would like to think that we, and other charities like us, can offer at least a small part of the solution.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the Veterans Foundation for their supporting grant for Project-100.

VETERANS FOUNDATION

PTSD Resolution
Counselling Forces' Veterans & Reservists
registered charity no. 1133188

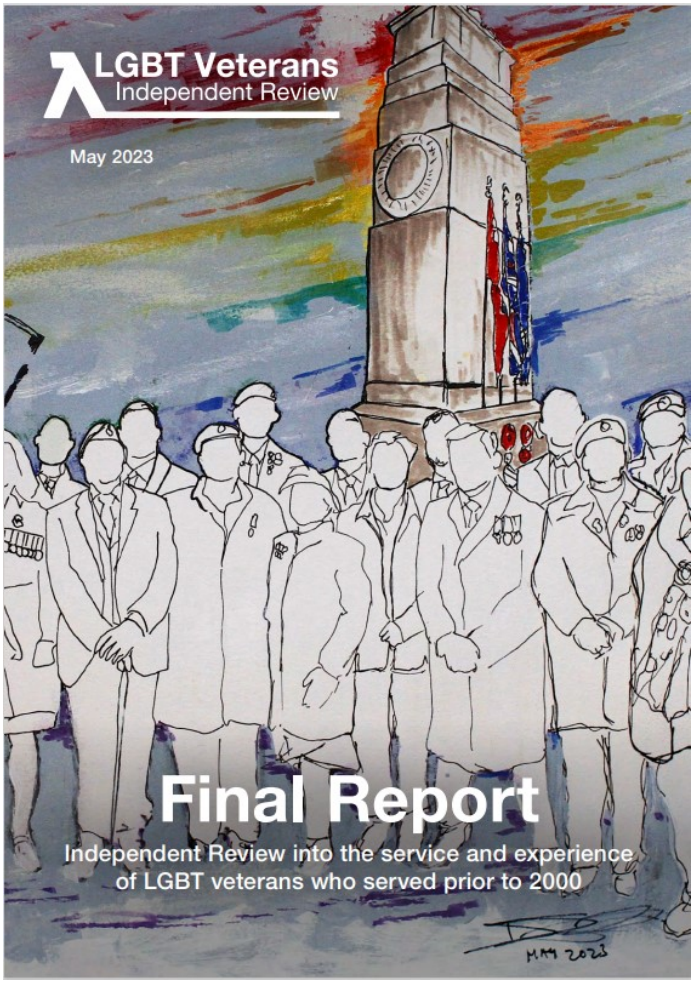
Publishing Spotlight!

Independent Review by Lord Etherton into the service and experience of LGBT veterans who served in HM Armed Forces between 1967 and 2000

Summary:

This report brings light to the detrimental effects of an official policy on LGBT veterans during the years 1967 and 2000, where this policy was then abandoned. This particular policy stipulated that no person who identified as part of the LGBT community was to be a member of the armed forces. In practice, this meant that if members had already enrolled then dismissal was implemented immediately and if there were any suspicions of members identifying as part of the LGBT community then this tended to lead to bullying, discrimination and in many cases physical harm.

With several accounts of those who suffered the most from this, Lord Etherton has concluded with recommendations of the government acknowledging this policy was wrong as well as ways in which to support veterans who have been affected by this, but also acknowledges that there are greater support systems in place for those veterans through charities and the NHS.



Have you signed up to Knowledge Hub?

Knowledge Hub is an online discussion platform exclusive for veterans mental health services signed up to QNVMHS.

The platform allows members to:

- Ask questions, have conversations, discuss solutions to problems and share experiences
- Network with one another independently
- Upload, share and comment on documents
- Promote forthcoming events and access events and booking forms

If you would like to sign up, please email us so we can send you an invitation

The Importance of Veteran Recovery Colleges

Edward Dean, *CEO,* Anxious Minds

A Path to Healing and Success

Welcome to an exploration of the importance of Veteran Recovery Colleges. In this article, we will delve into the significance of these specialised educational institutions in providing support, guidance, and empowerment to veterans and their families who are on their journey towards recovery, healing, and reintegration into society.
We will discuss the unique challenges faced by veterans and their families, the benefits of Veteran Recovery Colleges, and the comprehensive programs and services they offer.

So, let's begin our journey towards understanding the profound impact of Veteran Recovery Colleges.

What Are Veteran Recovery Colleges?

Veteran recovery colleges are educational institutions specifically designed to address the needs of veterans and their families who are recovering from physical or psychological injuries sustained during their service or after. These colleges provide a supportive and nurturing environment where veterans and their families can acquire skills, knowledge, and resources to facilitate their recovery process and successfully transition into civilian life.

The Role of Veteran Recovery Colleges in Supporting Veterans and their families Assisting with Transition

One of the primary roles of Veteran Recovery Colleges is to support veterans and their families in their transition from military to civilian life. They provide a structured environment that helps veterans adjust to new routines, social dynamics, and academic expectations.

Tailored Support Services

Veteran Recovery Colleges offer a range of specialised support services, including counselling, addiction recovery support, outdoor therapy, mindfulness, support groups, mentoring, and vocational training. These services are tailored to address the unique needs of veterans and their families and promote their overall well-being.

The Unique Challenges Faced by Veterans and their families

Veterans and their families often face numerous challenges when transitioning to civilian life. These challenges can have a significant impact on their mental health, self -esteem, and ability to reintegrate into society.

Understanding these challenges is crucial in recognising the importance of veteran recovery colleges.

Many veterans struggle with mental health, some experience post-traumatic stress

References available upon request

disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related conditions as a result of their service. These conditions can manifest in various ways, such as flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and depression. Veteran recovery colleges provide a supportive environment that acknowledges and addresses these mental health challenges.

Physical Injuries and Disabilities

Veterans may also face physical injuries or disabilities that require ongoing medical care and support. These injuries can range from combat-related wounds to service-related chronic conditions. Veteran recovery colleges offer specialised resources and accommodations to ensure that veterans can access education and support despite their physical limitations.

The Benefits of Veteran Recovery Colleges

The importance of Veteran Recovery Colleges lies in the multitude of benefits they offer to veterans. Let's explore some of these benefits in detail:

⇒ **Early intervention** is a key aspect of the Veteran Recovery College. With a commitment to providing immediate support, veterans are encouraged to walk through the doors and embark on their recovery journey from the very first day. The inclusive and welcoming environment ensures that veterans feel comfortable and empowered to seek the assistance they need to begin their healing process.

⇒ **Holistic Approach** to Recovery Veteran recovery colleges adopt a holistic approach to recovery, addressing the physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of veterans' well-being. By focusing on the whole person, these colleges provide a comprehensive support system that helps veterans heal and thrive.

⇒ **Peer Support and Camaraderie.** One of the unique aspects of veteran recovery colleges is the strong emphasis on peer support and camaraderie. Veterans can connect with fellow service members who have experienced similar challenges, fostering a sense of community, understanding, and shared experiences.

⇒ **Academic and Vocational Opportunities.** Veteran recovery colleges offer a wide range of academic and vocational opportunities to veterans. These institutions provide access to high-quality education, career counselling, and skills training programs that enable veterans to enhance their employability and pursue fulfilling careers.

⇒ **Long Term Support.** The Veteran Recovery College provides long term support to veterans and their families in their journey towards recovery and well-being with a focus on counselling, support groups, and addiction recovery and skills training to empower veterans and enhance their quality of life.

QNVMHS Annual Forum

On the 11th July 2023, we held our third annual forum for the Quality Network for Veterans Mental Health Services (QNVMHS).

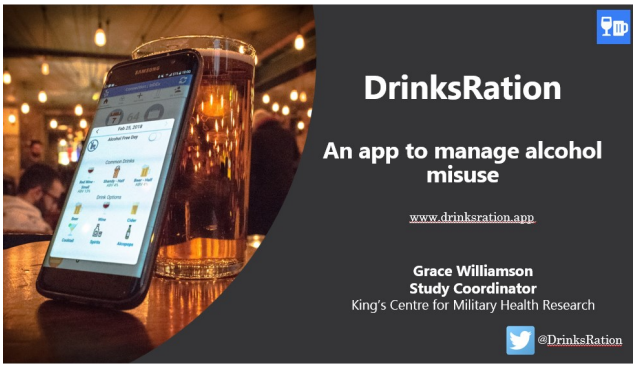
Quality Network Update

Jem Jethwa, Programme Manager
Hannah Lucas-Motley, Head of Quality and Accreditation

The forum started off with Jem and Hannah sharing highlights of peer reviews, feedback and developments in the Network

Anna Owen from the Contact Group gave an update and the various workstreams they have as priorities at the moment.

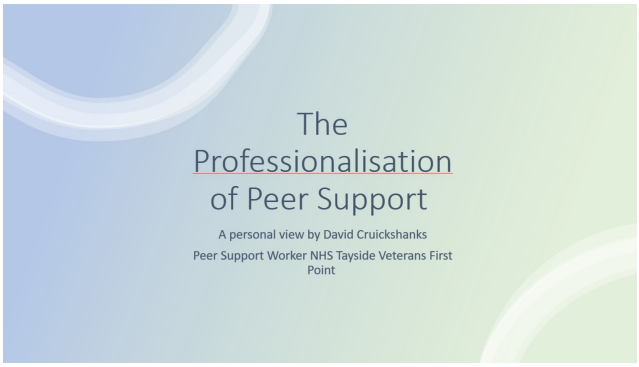
Rachel Price introduced the services that Cobseo provides to members and their families both directly as well with the sector they collaborate with highlighting the work they do with the female cluster.



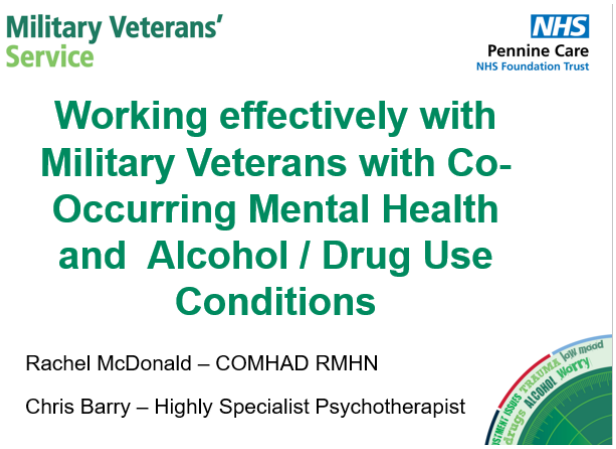
Grace Williamson raised awareness on how technology interventions can help with support, manage, and monitor alcohol consumption challenges in personnel of the Armed forces

Mary Keeling and Kirsty Diamond shared on what the centre provides in terms of policy and practice based on research evidence and how this ties into the support they provide ex-personnel and their families.

Craig Jones and Caroline Paige speak on the Ban against the LGBTQ+ and how there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in supporting ex-serving and serving personnel that were affected.



David Cruickshanks spoke on the debate of whether lived experiences is enough to provide peer support and also shed light on qualifications that benefit peer support intervention.



Rachel McDonald and Chris Barry presented on the challenges and the best strategies for practice when working with personnel that are experiencing challenges with alcohol and drug misuse.

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combatstress.org.uk

Noami Wilson and Dominique Mossman-Smith shared the process of revisiting their treatment, the implementation and delivery outcomes of the intensive treatment services. They also concluded that these treatment are feasible and meaningful.

Bill Andrews shared a follow up on Project-100 that was presented in the last forum. According to their outcomes there has been improvement in personnel symptoms in depression and anxiety. Outcomes are looking promising for the intervention that PTSD Intervention are studying.

Have you read our Aggregated Report (2021-2022)?

Before we publish our next one, why not take a look at our aggregated report for Veterans Mental Health Services (PDF) following the 2021 - 2022 cycle.

This report provides an overview of how services performed against the QNVMHS standards and helps services benchmark themselves against their peers. It also provides a great range of good practice examples and themes from commonly unmet standards.

You can access the report on our website.

NEWLY ACCREDITED MEMBERS

We want to congratulate the following services for achieving accreditation and thank all teams for their hard work and dedication throughout the process:

Organisation	Team	Accreditation Date
Combat Stress	Combat Stress	19/12/2022
First Point Lothian	NHS Lothian	13/01/2023
Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust	Veteran's Mental Health and Wellbeing Service	20/07/2023

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Useful Links

QNVMHS Website:
Quality Network for Veterans Mental Health Services | Royal College of Psychiatrists (rcpsych.ac.uk)

The Royal College of Psychiatrists:
www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Contact Group
www.contactarmedforces.co.uk

Veterans' Gateway
Advice and support for veterans & ex-forces | Veterans' Gateway (veteransgateway.org.uk)

Royal British Legion
Veterans' Gateway | Royal British Legion

General queries:
veterans@rcpsych.ac.uk

QNVMHS standards, 2nd edition
Access the standards here

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Follow us: **@rcpsych @rcpsychCCQI_**
And use **#QNVMHS** for up-to-date information

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Would you like to be featured in our next newsletter?
If you have an article that you would like to submit for the next edition of our newsletter, please email us!

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