






VITAL Program Coordinator: JESSIE H. THREY, Ph.D.








## Acknowledgments





- Veterans Everywhere for all They Teach Us
- University Partners
- VITAL Initiative National Team
  - Derek Blumke, VITAL Initiative Director
- Cincinnati VA Medical Center (CVAMC)
  - Linda D. Smith, FACHE, Medical Center Director
  - Robert E. Falcone, M.D., Chief of Staff
  - Peter Kotcher, M.D., MHCL Chief
- CVAMC Affiliates
  - Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
  - VET Center, Outreach


## Personal Background





- Clinical Psychologist
- Cincinnati VA Medical Center (CVAMC)
- PTSD & Anxiety Disorders Division
- Post-Deployment Clinic (OEF/OIF/OND)
- Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) Initiative Program Coordinator


## Overview




- Veteran Population Facts
- What is VITAL Initiative?
  - VITAL Director
  - History
  - Sites
  - Goals
  - Services
- Academic Partnerships
- Student Veteran Facts
- Post-Deployment
  - Integration Challenges
  - Presenting Concerns
  - Academic Challenges
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## Overview




- Veteran Population Facts
- What is VITAL Initiative?
  - History
  - Sites
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- Post-Deployment
  - Challenges & Concerns
  - Academia
  - Barriers to Care
- VITAL Future








## Veteran Population





- Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Estimates:
  - Total Number of Veterans Nationwide: 22,658,000
  - Aged 17 -44: More than 4,230,000
- 2.4 Million Troops Have Served in OEF/OIF/OND
  - Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn
- Ohio: 153,000
  - Greater Cincinnati Area: >36,000
- Kentucky: 67,000
- Indiana: 88,000


## Veteran Health Care





- Enrolled in VA Healthcare: 8,343,000
- Utilized VA Healthcare: 600,000
- Receiving VA Disability Compensation: 3,210,261
- Receiving GI Bill Benefits: 819,281
- Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab): 61,465


## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Care



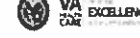




- 16 Initiatives
- Goal: Massive Transformation to Better Serve Veterans
  - Improving Veterans Mental Health
  - Veteran-Centric Coordinated Health Care
  - Increased Access to Health Care
- 3 Guiding Principals:
  - People-Centric
  - Results-Driven
  - Forward-Looking
- Patient Centered
  - Collaborative Decision Making
  - Appreciation of Unique Factors


## The Title: VITAL




- Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership
  - "Vital to Student Veterans' Academic Success"
    - A VA Initiative aimed to support student Veterans on campus in their successful transition to and completion of their academic goals through increased access to health, mental health, programs and services.
- Integration to student Veteran Life: Most Veterans are entering college for the first time...versus coming back to it.
- Academic Leadership: The act of taking responsibility for one's own work, and setting the example for others through action and mentorship.
- VITAL is EMPOWERMENT








## VITAL Initiative




- Veteran-Centered
- Consistent with VA 21<sup>st</sup> Century Care Initiatives
- Collaboration between VA Medical Center & Academia
- Strategic-Solutions for Student Veterans
- VA Central Office - Grant Funded
- Supported Locally - CVAMC








## VITAL Director





- Derek Blumke
- Air Force: 1999-2005
- Michigan Air National Guard: 2005-2011
- Three Tours: OEF
- Co-Founded Student Veterans of America (SVA)
  - President & Executive Director
  - 550 Chapters, 50 States, 3 Countries
  - Largest Community Based Organization of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans in US
- Awards
  - Multiple National and Collegiate Awards


## VITAL History





- Began with a Personal Experience On Campus
- Grew Through Development and Success of SVA
- Student Veteran Feedback
- Voice on Capital Hill
- San Francisco City College
  - 2010: 730 Veterans Seen through VA Outreach


## VITAL Sites





- **Initial 5, 2010**
  - Bedford, MA
  - Tuscaloosa, AL
  - Ann Arbor, MI
  - Austin, TX
  - San Francisco, CA
- **2012**
  - Baltimore, MD
  - Biloxi, MS
  - Canandaigua, NY
  - Chicago, IL
  - Cincinnati, OH
  - Madison, WI
  - Marion, IL
  - Minneapolis, MN
  - Muskogee, OK
  - Orlando, FL
  - Palo Alto, CA
  - West Haven, CT
  - Reno, NV
  - Salt Lake, UT
  - Walla Walla, WA


## VITAL Goals





- Promote Veteran Success in University/College
- Develop Trust Between Service Members & VA; Community & VA
- Increase Enrollment & Vesting of Returning Veterans
- Facilitate Early Intervention for Health/Mental Health
- Prevent Suicide
- Improve Access to Evidence Based Treatment
- Reduce No Show Rates Among OEF/OIF/OND
- Data Collection
- Increase Community Awareness & Collaboration
- Developing Best Practice Guidelines


## VITAL Services




- **Faculty & Staff**
  - Education: Military & Veteran Culture, VAMC System of Care, Mental Health Concerns & Treatment
  - Consultation about Veteran Specific Issues that Impact Performance & Retention
  - Work with College/University Counseling Centers in Serving the Unique Mental Health Needs of Veterans
  - Facilitation of Referrals/Requests between CVAMC Providers & Academia for Disability Accommodations & Resources
  - Referrals for Concerns Regarding Benefits

## Services Continued



- **Student Veterans**
  - Enrollment at CVAMC
  - Referral & Assistance with Resources & Benefits
  - Short-term EBT for Mental Health Concerns
  - Collaboration with Disability Services to Obtain Accommodations (i.e., Assistive Technology Devices)
  - Support with University Processes Academic Actions &/or Conduct Issues
  - Development of Student Veteran Peer Groups




### VITAL Academic Partners

- Cincinnati State Community & Technical College
- Gateway Community & Technical College (Edgewood, Boone, Urban)
- Miami University (Oxford, Hamilton, & Middletown)
- Northern Kentucky University
- The College of Mt. Saint Joseph
- The University of Cincinnati (Clifton, Clermont, Blue Ash)
- Xavier University




### VITAL Dedicated Staff


- Certifying Officials
- Counseling & Psychological Services
- Office of Disability Services
- Advising/Guidance
- Individual Instructors
- Veterans Affairs Officers



### VITAL Student Veteran Facts


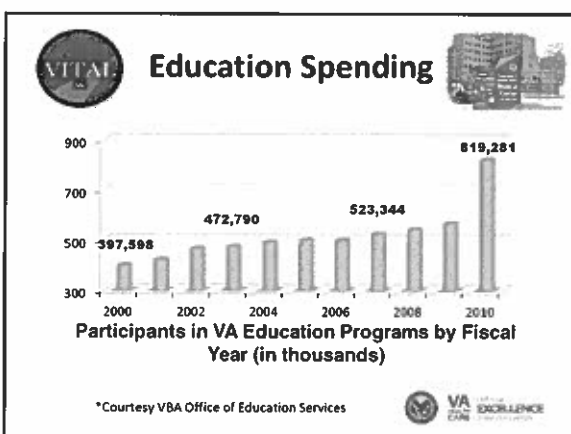
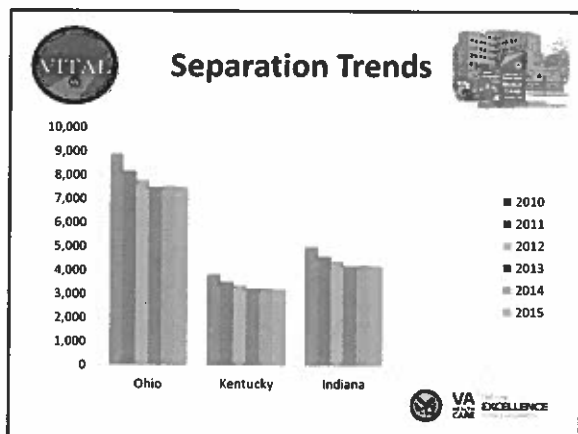


- Mostly Enlisted
- All Branches
- Ages 27-Mid 40's
- Families
  - 40% with Children Under Age 5
- Employed & Career Focused
- Dedicated, Mature, Disciplined
- Guard & Reservists




### VITAL Student Veteran Population Factors

- Post 9/11 GI Bill
  - Implementation in 2009 Has Led to Significant Increases in Education Benefits Provided to Military Members
- Conflicts Ending
  - Personnel Reductions of Military Forces Result in Large Numbers of Veterans Seeking to Begin or Return to Higher Education
- State of the Economy
  - Most Jobs Require at Least Some Higher Education





## VITAL Geography of the Population



- More Than Half of All Student Veterans Using the GI Bill Are Utilizing It in 10 States:
  - Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia
- Two-year colleges: 33%
- Four-year colleges: 48%
- Graduate programs: 8%
- OJT/Other programs: 11%



\*Courtesy VBA Office of Education Services




## VITAL Post Deployment


## VITAL Reintegration Challenges

- **Emotional/Cognitive**
  - People Don't Understand Me
  - Coping with Loss
  - VA is for Older People
  - Universities for Kids
- **Social**
  - No Longer Feeling Like One of the Guys/Gals
  - Loss of Military Camaraderie
- **Identity Transformation**
  - Leaving Active Duty
  - From Warrior to Partner, Parent, Student, Employee & Family Member
- **Navigating the System**
  - Health Care Benefits
  - Compensation & Pension
  - Education & Other Benefits
  - Academics




## VITAL Common Presenting Concerns

- Startle Response & Hypervigilance
- Inattention/Trouble Concentrating/Memory Problems
- Migraines
- Chronic Back & Joint Pain
- Avoidance of People, Places, Situations
- Low Frustration Tolerance & Difficulty Getting Along with Others
- Financial, Occupational, & Academic Difficulty
- Not Sleeping
- Substance Abuse/Dependence (Alcohol, Tobacco & Caffeine, Pain Medication)






## VITAL Medical Conditions


- **Seriously Medically Injured – over 40,000**
  - Amputations, Burns, Paralysis
  - Better Safety Equipment = Increased Survival
- **Chronic Pain**
  - >33% Back
  - >38% Limb/Joint
  - >75.3% TBI Related Migraine
- **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**
  - Estimated 320,00 Service Members
- **Sleep Disturbance**
  - Nightmares, Insomnia, Sleep Apnea, Snoring, Restless Leg Syndrome & Sleep Cycle Disturbances




## VITAL Lost Sleep

- Average of 4 Hours at a Time During a Tour










## Mental Health Conditions





- Estimated 12 - 20% of OEF/OIF Veterans Diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - 228,361
- **What is PTSD?** An Anxiety Disorder that Can Occur after You Have Seen, Heard About, Experienced or Witnessed a Traumatic Event Such as:
  - Combat exposure
  - Child sexual or physical abuse
  - Terrorist attack
  - Sexual or physical assault
  - Serious accidents, like a car wreck
  - Natural disasters, like fire, tornado, hurricane, flood, or earthquake
- **Depressive Disorders**
  - 174,799
- **Alcohol Dependence**
  - 49,797


## Post-Combat Academic Stressors





- Hallway Congestion
- Sensitive Classroom Discussions (i.e., Politics, Military/War, etc.)
- Noises (i.e., Campus Construction, Bells, Rain, Helicopters etc.)
- Foreign Students & Foreign Languages
- Proximity of Seating, Lack of Seating
- Classroom Presentations
- Being Identified or Singled Out as a Veteran
- Negative Stereotypes Attached to Veterans (i.e., Violence, Arrogance, Entitlement etc.)
- Psychological Reactivity (i.e., Heat, Smells)


## Barriers to Learning





- Side Effects of Medication
- Poor Attention Span
- Poor Home Life or Stress in Relationships
- Difficulty Staying Awake
- Difficulty Hearing the Lecture
- Difficulty Making it to Class (i.e., Driving, Poor sleep)
- Test Taking Anxiety or Disability


## Barriers to Care





- Age – Younger Veterans Don't Feel Understood & Feel Invincible
- Men Are Less Likely to Seek Help Than Women
- Home, Work, & School Obligations
- Stigma of MH
- Psychological Factors Perpetuating Avoidance
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - Depression
  - Substance Abuse/Dependence


## Overcoming Barriers




- **Patient Centered Approach**
  - Meeting Patients Where They Are
  - Collaboration in Planning for Care
  - Offering Alternatives
  - Appreciation of Unique Factors
- **Outreach**
  - Military
  - College/University Campuses
  - Community
- **Collaborative care**
  - Partnerships with Allied Professionals
  - Implementing Best Practices





## VITAL Future




- **Telehealth On Campus**
  - Psychotherapy
  - Study Skills
  - Organization/Planning/Time Management
- **Mobile Van**
  - Enrollment & Vesting Clinic
  - Health & Wellness Fairs/ Suicide Prevention Week/ National Depression Screening Events/Women's Health Orientation Fairs
- **National Manual for Best Practice Guidelines**
- **Building Community Partnerships**
- **Work Study Program**
- **STARS Program**








## STARS Certification









- **Supporting Transitioning and Returning Service Members**
  - Multi-Step Process of Training
    - Military Culture
    - VA System of Care
    - Post-Deployment Care
    - Physical/Mental Health Awareness
    - Benefits/Resources
    - Classroom Etiquette & Response
- Increase Knowledge & Awareness
- Demonstrates Support of Veterans
- Facilitates Communication with Veterans


## How to Help





- VITAL Partnership
- Refer Veterans to VA
- Promote a Veteran Friendly Campus
- Endorse Classroom Etiquette
- If in Doubt, Seek Consultation


## VA Referral/Contacts





- Jessica H. Thiede, Psy.D.
  - VITAL Initiative, Program Coordinator
  - (513) 276-1800
  - [Jessica.Thiede@va.gov](mailto:Jessica.Thiede@va.gov)
- Karen Cutright, LISW, Program Manager
  - OEF/OIF/OND Clinic
  - (513) 475-6921
- Cincinnati VA Medical Center
  - [www.cincva.gov](http://www.cincva.gov)
- Cincinnati Vet Center
  - (513) 763-3500


## Organizations for Student Veterans




- Student Veterans of America
  - <http://www.studentveterans.org/>
  - Coalition of student Veteran groups from college and university campuses
  - Aims to develop new student groups, coordinate between existing student groups, and advocate on behalf of students-Veterans at the local, state, and national levels
- Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America
  - [www.iava.org](http://www.iava.org)
  - The nation's first and largest group dedicated to the Troops and Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the civilian supporters of those Troops and Veterans
- Service members Opportunity Colleges (SOC)
  - [www.soc.oscu.org](http://www.soc.oscu.org)
  - Functions in conjunction with 15 higher education associations, the Department of Defense, and Active and Reserve Components of the Military Services
  - Aims to expand and improve voluntary post-secondary education opportunities for service members worldwide.
- Today's GI Bill
  - [www.gi1111.va.gov](http://www.gi1111.va.gov)
  - Provides guidance on the steps to making the most out of their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits





## Online Resources




- After Deployment
  - <http://www.afterdeployment.org/>
  - Behavioral health resource
  - Supports service members, their families, and Veterans with common post-deployment challenges
  - Mission is to provide self-care solutions targeting PTSD, depression, and other behavioral health challenges.
- Real Warriors
  - <http://www.rehabilitation.net/>
  - Promotes the processes of building resilience, facilitating recovery and supporting reintegration
  - Contains information for Veterans, Active Duty, Families, National Guard and Reserves, and Health Professionals.
- National Resource Directory
  - <http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/>
  - Provides wounded, ill and injured Service Members and Veterans, their families, and those who support them with a web-based directory of valuable resources.
  - Delivers information on, and access to the full range of medical and non-medical services and resources to assist with recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration
- Cincinnati Veterans Administration Medical Center
  - <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/online/>
  - Provides comprehensive health care to America's veterans.







### More Online





- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress:  
[http://www.cstsonline.org/resources/category-4\\_families](http://www.cstsonline.org/resources/category-4_families)
- Hooah4health, Department of the Army, Department of Defense (DoD):  
<http://hooah4health.com/4life/hooah4family/default.htm>
- Military Family Research Institute: <http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/mfri/>
- Military Onesource: <http://www.militaryonesource.com>
- National Military Family Association: <http://nmfa.org>
- Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors: [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)



VA **EXCELLENCE**




### DOD/VA Suicide Outreach




## IT'S YOUR CALL

Confidential help for Veterans and their families




**Veterans  
Crisis Line**  
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 9


Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net)




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### References



- VA Office of Public Health  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/doc/epidemiology>
- United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
[Http://www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)




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*"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan..."*

- Abraham Lincoln -



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