



Narrative and Peer-to-Peer Approaches in Counseling Military and Veterans

Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers of New York State (ASAP)

ASAP's 4th Annual Veterans Summit

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Presenters:

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Agenda



1. Welcome/Introductions
2. Military Culture & Treatment Considerations
3. Narrative Approaches in Counseling
4. Narrative Techniques Demonstrations
5. Peer-to-Peer Approaches & Examples
6. Summary
7. Wrap Up

Welcome



Thank you for coming.

Presenter Information

- Personal, professional, & occupational interest in military populations

Audience Information

- Who is here with us today? Veterans? Military Dependents? Practitioners?

Military Culture



- Military Language and Terminology

<https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/military-terms-and-jargon.html>

- Clinicians' experiences with the military shape their perception of the population (e.g. personal, media, etc.)
- Military culture exists on several levels: individual, family, institution
- Military/veterans culture varies by: combat era, branch of service, rank, MOS, type of service (e.g., active, Reserve, Guard, Veteran, etc.)
- May include other multicultural components: age, race, gender, religious, sexual orientation, etc.
- Discipline, professional ethos, ceremonies & etiquette, and esprit de corps & cohesion (Lynn Hall)



Military Values = engrained culture

Army Warrior Ethos

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

The Army Values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, Personal Courage

“It guides Marines to remain faithful to the mission at hand, to each other, to the Corps and to country, no matter what. Becoming a Marine is a transformation that cannot be undone, and ***Semper Fidelis*** is a permanent reminder of that. Once made, a Marine will forever live by the ethics and values of the Corps.”

Marine Corps Values: Honor, Courage, Commitment, Ductus Exemplo (Lead by Example)



Share elements of *individual* military culture:

- Discipline
- Pride
- Ceremony/Etiquette
- Helping others/Service
- Cohesion/Esprit de Corps
- Strength, including inability to show weakness

Shared elements of military *family* culture:

- Flexibility
- Resiliency
- Shared responsibility
- Readiness
- Role-reversal/role-exchange, including role-conflict & role-ambiguity

How might these characteristics be both strengths and weaknesses for those seeking/needing services?



Treatment Planning Considerations

Some experience:

- Unemployment or underemployment
- Homelessness
- Family/Child/Spouse Issues
- Addiction
- Suicide
- PTSD (and TBI)
- Other mental illness

Many experience:

- Stigma of mental illness
- Separation, Reunion, and Reintegration
- Deployment & Redeployment
- Potential for isolation

**Questions or comments
on Military Culture?**

Narrative Therapy



- Primarily credited to Michael White and David Epston
- Shares commonalities with humanistic, existential, solution-oriented, focuses, as well as other philosophies
- Creation of personal narratives; constructing meaning through experiences, create narratives that connect these experiences; interwoven with social narratives
- Therapy is a collaborative effort to re-author the story; find new meaning in the events; tell them from various angles.
- Movement from a 'thin description' (one story = one outcome) to a 'thick description' (multiple stories/outcomes)
- Externalizing the problem; client is not the problem, the problem is the problem; envision problem as separate

Narrative Therapy



“Can we facilitate posttraumatic growth in combat veterans?”
Tedeschi & McNally, 2011

- Not just treatment, but growth; resiliency training (Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program).

Five Parts:

1. Understanding trauma as precursor to posttraumatic growth
2. Emotional regulation enhancement
3. Constructive self-disclosure
4. Creating a trauma narrative with posttraumatic growth domains*
5. Developing life principles that are robust to challenges

Narrative Therapy



- Used in all counseling settings: personal, social, career
- Limitations: cognitive approach; requires intellect, communication
- Communication formats may vary (e.g. spoken, written, creative arts, etc.)
- Developing interest in narrative techniques
- Sample narrative techniques:
 - Dr. Pamela Brott, *Virginia Tech*, “*Storied Approach*”
 - Constructivist approaches to career counseling & career assessments (2004)
 - Life Line
 - Card sorts

**Questions or comments
on Narrative Therapy?**

Peer to Peer



- Peer to peer counseling model not new: PROS programs, parent modeling, etc.
- Veterans groups not necessarily peer-to-peer **counseling**; include peer-to-peer: Support groups, 1:1 Mentoring, Social support, & Writing groups
- Limited empirical data on these programs
- Research out of the VA reporting positive outcomes
- Success in small numbers
- Highlight VA program, some examples in our area and NY
- Value in connecting veterans in recovery to other veteran programs and activities, **if** veteran identifies with military culture



Veterans Affairs (VA) Peer Specialist

[\(http://www.vacareers.va.gov/peer-to-peer/\)](http://www.vacareers.va.gov/peer-to-peer/)

- Mental health focus
- Peer Specialist (PS): mental health and/or co-occurring condition; trained and certified, identify and achieve specific life & recovery goals
- PS actively engaged in his/her own recovery, and volunteers or is hired to provide peer support services
- Peer Support Apprentice meets all of the requirements of Peer Support Specialists, except they are not certified.
- Also help Veterans identify the tools and resources
- Executive order for VA to hire 800 peer specialists by the end of 2013



Local/Suffolk Area Peer-to-Peer Programs

- **Suffolk County United Veterans - Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Project:** Bring together five to 10 veterans at a time led by “peer facilitators” — fellow veterans trained to spot issues and suggest approaches; not designed to replace traditional mental health treatment. Vet-to-Vet program:
<http://www.vet2vetusa.org>

<http://www.mentalhealthandwellness.org/scuv/>

- **Boots on the Ground:** Services - PTSD Support Groups (men’s & women’s groups), Caregivers Group, Veterans 12 Step Group, Peer Support, Holistic Healing, PT (Physical Training), Veterans Activity Center (VAC), Food Pantry, Care Packages, Emphasizes purpose, belonging, support
<http://www.bootsonthegroundny.com/>



Other NY Peer-to-Peer Programs

- **CompeerCORPS (Rochester):** peer mentoring organization: Added vet-to-vet mentoring; Goals: Foster a positive return to civilian life, Broadened interests and hobbies, Create a spirit of service to the community, Bridge generational gaps among Veteran eras, Encourage overall wellness;
<http://compeerrochester.org/compeercorps>
- **Syracuse Veterans' Writers Group:** Open to all veterans and their supporters; Focus on writing nonfiction accounts or "true stories" of life in and out of the military; Different purposes for veterans: process difficult/traumatic experiences, want others to know what they experienced, for historical purposes, etc. <http://wrt.syr.edu/syrvetwriters>
Video "An Open Letter to My Boots"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lo5Jj-GwAVU>



Primary Benefits of Narrative & Peer to Peer Approaches

1. Reducing stigma by normalizing concerns
2. Reducing isolation by increasing connections
3. Increasing access to support by utilizing community-based resources

Robertson, H. C. (2015). Narrative and peer-to-peer approaches in counseling military and veterans: A review of current literature and practices. *Journal of Military and Government Counseling*, 3, 66-78. ISSN: 2165-7726

<http://acegonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/JMGC-Vol-3-Is-2.pdf>

Other Techniques



“Providing Counseling Support to Veterans and their Families”
David Fennell, PhD, USAF Col (Ret), ACA Presentation

- **“Counselor as Student”** – soldier is teaching you; soldiers are used to leading
- Learning without therapy-izing, non-threatening
- Normalize symptoms: “normal reaction to abnormal circumstances”

Also:

- Grief techniques – may mourn for others, self, role/soldier combat; pride; sacrifice
- Trauma-focused strategies

Summary



- Importance of understanding military culture
- Awareness of therapeutic needs
- Provide opportunities to share their story: Narrative approaches may supplement other strategies; build rapport
- Seek out Peer-to-Peer Veterans programs
- Support Services for Veterans
 - In person vs. online
 - National, State, Community, Local
 - Veterans Benefits, if applicable
 - At-risk veterans (e.g. comorbidity, criminal justice system, etc.)

Wrap Up



- Questions, comments, feedback?
- Brainstorming session
- What are your go-to resources for working with veterans/military?
 - Veterans' resources?
 - Counselors' resources?
 - Other theoretical approaches?

Reference list provided for other literature.

Contact Information



Thank you for coming!

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