Since the last bulletin, your Auxiliaries have contacted their local medical facilities and know what the needs are in terms of volunteers, activities, and sponsorships. So let’s now look at how to recruit the volunteers and bring awareness to Suicide Prevention.

Recruiting Volunteers:

I am thrilled that National Headquarters has put our Ambassador’s Presentations on the National website. Please take a look at my Hospital PowerPoint presentation given at the National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. It covers all the goals with suggestions on how to participate in the Hospital Program from recruiting volunteers to promoting military suicide and mental health awareness.

Let’s look at recruiting regularly scheduled volunteers. The best approach is to understand what your potential volunteers enjoy doing with their time. Here are some examples of volunteers I encounter each week when I volunteer.

- **Teaching Bible Study Classes** – Most facilities will have a chapel and might have a service for a few religious denominations on Sundays, but bible study may not be offered. If you have a member of your Auxiliary or non-member in your church you think may enjoy giving these classes, ask them to consider it and then make the introduction to the medical facility. In the facility I work in, volunteers, both members and non-members get together once a week and give a class to those residents/patients that choose to attend. They include music in their program. Some facilities have a piano while others do not and that’s where having a cell phone handy comes into play. Download a gospel song or hymn on it and be ready to play it for a sing along. This regularly scheduled activity is well attended and if the commitment is made to do it regularly, the residents/patients will come to look forward to it. By the way, it’s a class and can be held any day of the week, any time of the day that doesn’t interfere with meals.

- **Knitting/Crochet Classes** – What’s great about learning to knit or crochet is that they require concentration and therefore, veterans with PTSD or patients in long term care, can while away the time and keep their dark thoughts and boredom at bay. Check with your Auxiliary members and in the community for volunteers who would enjoy teaching the classes. There is an Auxiliary in western North Carolina with a group that meets weekly to knit afghans for the hospitalized and hospice patients. They call themselves “The Happy Hookers”. You may have a group just like them in your community that may be willing to give classes. In the VAMC I volunteer at each week, there are two women that give knitting classes to the outpatient Mental Health patients. What’s therapeutic about it is that not only can they do it at home but it takes the veteran’s mind off what troubles him/her. They get to see immediate results of their efforts, giving them a sense of accomplishment which in turn raises their self-esteem. A regularly scheduled volunteer will more than likely have a new student every time he or she gives a class. It too will be something the patients will come to look forward to. The stitches vary, the projects vary, the comradery grows and the healing spreads.

- **More ideas on recruiting – (match positions to your potential volunteers):**
  - A people person can work the information desk.
o Someone who likes to keep moving can serve as a patient escort.
o Someone who likes doing office work (like me) can assist in departments that are shorthanded due to illness, vacations or simply understaffed.
o A creative individual can volunteer to hold classes – for instance painting or music lessons.
o Someone who likes to talk can go room to room to visit with patients.
o A shy person can make appointment reminder calls.
o Do you know someone who likes to assemble puzzles? There is a nursing home resident waiting for a puzzle partner right this minute.
o How about an event organizer? I bet the patients and residents would love weekly or monthly birthday parties.
o A sports enthusiast can hold a weekly game night or a Sunday game party.

**Suicide Awareness:**

The good news is that the numbers are beginning to come down. A new study conducted by the Veterans Administration (VA) published in the VFW Action Corps Weekly dated July 8, 2016 shows that veterans and military members are choosing life by receiving medical care to combat their mental demons. However, the number is still high – 20 per day. This new study proves that if we continue to spread awareness, we can help to save lives. To read more about the findings, you can access the VA press release at [http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2801](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2801).

**September is Suicide Awareness Month.** Let’s promote it! We can do it in a subtle way by wearing a blue teardrop to attract the attention of people we encounter throughout the day. The template for it can be downloaded off the National website at [http://vfw auxiliary.org/wp-content/uploads/Veteran-Military-Suicide-Awareness-Stickers.pdf](http://vfw auxiliary.org/wp-content/uploads/Veteran-Military-Suicide-Awareness-Stickers.pdf). Wearing it will give you the opportunity when asked, and you will be asked why you’re wearing it. You can explain that our veterans and military are taking their own lives at a rate of 20 per day and we need to spread the word on the warning signs so they can get the help they need. Even if you reach one person, you will be instrumental in getting one person closer to saving a life. Education is the key in battling the loss of life due to suicide.

You can also acquire handouts from websites such as the Veterans Crisis Line [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net) or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline website, [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org). The materials are free. Set them out at your events. Place them in waiting areas in local businesses – the beauty salon, nail salon, car repair shop, and doctor offices.

It is heart-wrenching to lose a life to suicide when there is so much help available. If we all know the signs of someone in mental distress, see the signs, and know how to approach the person to get them help, we will drastically reduce the number of incidents of suicide. So, please do all you can to educate as many as you can to help relieve their pain and get them mentally well again.

**Military Mental Health Awareness:** (National President Colette and Commander-in-Chief Brian’s, Special project.)

Have you ever felt like you’re not understood? It must be frustrating to have feelings no one other than a fellow military member can understand. Coming home from hazardous duty must be so traumatic for our veterans. How can we as civilians understand to help make the veteran feel “It’s ok, we appreciate what you must be going through” because we can never know exactly what they’re feeling. If you have
not been in combat or in a daily environment of hostility, you cannot know what they feel. However, that does not mean you cannot learn what triggers the veteran’s anxiety or a reaction that seems exaggerated to us. If we educate ourselves on the signs and symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), we can better determine how to react and not further upset the veteran. By our taking the initiative in teaching ourselves how to recognize the triggers and accept that the veteran’s reaction is not a personal one or intended to be hurtful, we demonstrate to the veteran, we care enough to try to make their lives less stressful by reacting with compassion and love. Learn more and get trained on Mental CPR at www.KnowtheFiveSigns.org/tools/oc/Bo/KnowtheFiveSigns.

Because we have “Unwavering Support for Uncommon Heroes®” and “No One Does More for Veterans®”

Did you know?

Volunteering offers the opportunity to learn new skills that can be used on a resume for those seeking employment. In fact, should the medical facility have an opening and the volunteer has the requirements and skills, their work ethic is already known and could be the door opening to employment at that facility. Anyone looking for employment should consider volunteering during unemployment as idle time on a resume never looks favorable to a potential employer.