

Joanie Cruce Interview Continued

What are some of the special problems or challenges that our veterans face?

Joanie. Transportation, in the rural counties is a challenge for our veterans. In the rural counties there is no access to public transportation. It is extremely difficult for veterans who have disabilities. The VA has a shuttle that transports patients to Tallahassee, Lake City and Gainesville for appointments, but most veterans do not utilize it because sometimes they have to wait hours before the next shuttle runs, especially if they have appointments in Gainesville. The VA assists the veterans in every way possible to supply transportation, but in the rural areas it is a challenge even for the VA.

How prevalent are mental health issues?

Joanie: Mental issues are more profound than physical issues - - - PTSD, schizophrenia, Bi-polar, suicidal ideation are just a few. The VA provides support for a variety of mental health conditions and other challenges.

As a Christian lay person, how do you respond to your professional calling? Is it important to keep your faith separate from your professional work or do they sometimes inter-mesh?

Joanie: God is the leader of everything I do in my life and especially in the work that I do as a nurse. I feel the Lord has given me the blessing of nursing skills to heal and minister to his people.

The VA promotes the healing of veterans through mind, body and spirit. We have priests, ministers and chaplains as well as Whole Health coaches who serve the veterans. It is not discouraged to pray with or counsel with a veteran as long as they give their consent and we keep information completely confidential. It is our responsibility if an incident occurs with the veteran if we choose to do this. I choose to do it.

What do you think our readers need to know about our veterans and how can we better support them?

Joanie: The veterans who served our country deserve our care, respect and advocacy. Sometimes the injury is not on the outside where we can see it but on the inside. The lives of our service members and veterans are affected by PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and suicide far more than physical battle injuries. Two veterans die on average every day by suicide. They are our sons, daughters, spouses, siblings and beloved friends.

I would add that if you know of a Veteran who is having issues of any type including medical, mental, spiritual even legal to please refer to any of the resources below.

The VA has resources available that can help. Here are some of them:

www.va.gov/health-care/, Vet Center, 877-927-8387, Find a Vet Center, www.va.gov/find-locations, Veterans Crisis Line, for anyone you know who is in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, call 1800-273-8255 or chat online at <https://www.vetranscrisisline.net/chat>, Women or men who have suffered Military Sexual Trauma may call (904) 470-6900, ext. 1222 for assistance. For any Vet requesting Chaplain Services, they may contact The Chaplain Department, Lake City, Florida. Chaplain Terri Gast, M.Div, MSW, BCC (386) 755-3016, Ex. 39-2152, email: terri.gast@va.gov