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April 6, 2017

Chip Tansill, Director
Ohio Department of Veterans Services
77 South High Street, 7th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Director Tansill,

The American Academy of Nursing would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to our Veteran health initiative, *Have You Ever Served in the Military?*, launched at the 2013 conference of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA). Enclosed please find a packet of *Have You* materials for your use.

With approximately 69% of Veterans receiving health care from private practitioners who often lack knowledge of their patients' service history, the Academy identified a significant gap in Veteran care. Since its 2013 launch, *Have You Ever Served in the Military? (Have You Ever Served?)* has raised provider awareness of service connected health issues and the importance of obtaining and documenting military service histories in patients' health records. Asking every patient, *Have you or has someone close to you ever served in the military?*, makes private providers better positioned to timely diagnose and treat Veterans and their family members, as well as make appropriate referrals to the Veterans Health Administration. The Academy's *Have You Ever Served?* clinician pocket cards are being used by thousands of health providers throughout the 50 states.

In addition to increasing provider awareness, the Academy is reaching out to Veterans to ensure they are made aware of the specific risk factors and illnesses directly associated with military service and the importance of sharing their service history with their health providers. We are currently seeking support for this effort and appreciate your assistance in identifying potential partners.

To ensure the prior gap in Veteran care is permanently closed, the Academy continues to urge the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology to include the question, *Have you or has someone close to you ever served in the military?* in the electronic health records to focus on the unique needs and strengths of Americans who have served in the Armed Forces and their families.

The Academy appreciates NASDVA's continued support and endorsement of *Have You Ever Served?* and looks forward to working with you to improve Veteran health. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at Cheryl.Sullivan@AANnet.org.

Sincerely,

Cheryl G. Sullivan
Chief Executive Officer

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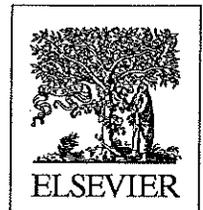


The Official Journal of the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science

“Have You Ever Served in the Military?” Campaign in Partnership With the Joining Forces Initiative

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American Academy of Nursing on Policy

“Have You Ever Served in the Military?” campaign in partnership with the Joining Forces Initiative

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The “call to action” for all Americans to “join forces” to ensure that our veterans and military and their families have the opportunities, resources, and support they have earned has been energizing. By bringing attention to the unique needs and strengths of Americans who have served in the Armed Forces, their spouses, and families, Joining Forces seeks to strengthen our nation by creating connections between civilian communities and the military/veteran population that will endure. Joining Forces is a national effort led by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden that highlights the needs of our American heroes and their families in the areas of employment, education, and wellness.

Nurses are on the front lines of providing care for our military veterans, whether they work in the Military Health System, the Veterans Health Administration, or in the civilian community. The American Academy of Nursing is adding its strength to the Joining Forces effort by launching the “Have You Ever Served in the Military?” campaign to ensure that all providers identify the veterans in their patient population to ensure appropriate care for military-related conditions.

Background and Problem Identification

Military service, whether in peace time or during war, in and of itself is an occupation that is fraught with stressors, toxic exposures, hazards, and safety risks not commonly encountered in the civilian population (Government Printing Office, 2013). For example, exposure to industrial solvents may cause skin or neurologic damage; noise from weapons, equipment, and other machinery can impair hearing, and vibration using power hand tools or operating machinery such as helicopters can lead to hand-arm vibration syndrome or low back pain (Veteran Benefits, 2013). War-time exposures have included Agent Orange

during the Vietnam War, and there are current concerns about lung disease after exposure to burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan (Kime, 2013).

There are over 23 million veterans of U.S. military service living in America and more than 1.4 million serving on active duty (Department of Defense, 2013). Fewer than 22% of this population uses the health care services provided by the Veterans Health Administration. Veterans Affairs (VA) has also reported that 40% of veterans rated for compensable disabilities associated with their military service did not use health services or programs provided by the department (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2010, 2013). One of the most challenging and pressing issues for VA is to identify veterans and link them to the resources developed for their care and treatment within the VA system.

America has relied on its citizen soldiers in many conflicts; these are the approximately 500,000 men and women of the National Guard and Reserve Components (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines). While on active duty, these service men and women are eligible to obtain health care from the Military Health Service, and upon release from active duty, they return to their previous source of health care. Typically, they receive civilian employer-provided health care and seek care from civilian providers who may not be aware of their active duty tenure or exposures as a result of active duty. Although National Guard and Reserve Component Veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom are eligible to register for care from the Veterans Health Administration upon release from active duty, not all take advantage of this opportunity.

Policy Solution

The nation’s medical and nursing schools have pledged to support the Joining Forces initiative by including

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curricular content that includes military-related occupational exposures and hazards (Daniel, 2012) to meet the unique health needs of service members. Although the initiative includes outreach to current providers, additional efforts are required to move beyond education into action at the provider-patient level. "The Have You Ever Served?" campaign takes a simplistic approach by asking providers to routinely ask all patients (men and women) if they have ever served in the military.

Almost one in eight Americans is a veteran or related to one (Newport, 2012). This single question (i.e., "Have you ever served in the military?") on intake can be crucial to timely and adequate assessments, diagnosis, and treatment of an individual for military occupational health exposures. Health care providers, especially those in the civilian sector, and their veteran patients may not know the full effects and complexities of the occupational and environmental risks encountered in the military and the consequences they pose to health and future well-being. Military service has many unknown challenges and dangers that contribute to health problems that may not occur until well after the individual has left the armed forces. For example, recent studies also indicate that some birth defects found in children of veterans can be linked to exposures encountered during their parent's military service (Institute of Medicine, 2011).

Nurses have a vital role to play in the evolving campaign for more educated providers who are aware of the multifaceted and complex needs of this growing population. Nurses in all settings are often the first health care provider an individual sees and often do initial health assessments and office intakes. They may be viewed as "gatekeepers" and key referral pivot points for referring military veterans to the appropriate source of health care for military-related conditions.

Nurses and other health care providers who are armed with the "Have You Ever Served in the Military?" pocket guide will be provided with questions to ask about common military-related exposures and with phone numbers and websites for referral purposes. Issues include post-traumatic stress disorder, home-

lessness, hepatitis C, assault, and trauma. Additionally, follow-up probing questions are also included on the guide. The pocket guide will assist health care providers in what to ask if patients respond "yes" to the have you ever served question.

The legacy of Florence Nightingale is for the nursing profession to be on the front lines in providing care for our military veterans. Today is no different; nurses can and must be vigilant in asking their patients if they have served and must know about military-related exposures and appropriate treatment as well as proper referral sources. The American Academy of Nursing is launching the "Have You Ever Served in the Military?" campaign in support of the Joining Forces Initiative.

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**Endorsement from the
National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs (NASDVA)**

Whereas, VA has recently reported that less than 20% of all veterans in America receive care from the VA Healthcare System and 40% of service-connected disabled veterans do not use VA for their care.

Whereas, military service, whether in peacetime or during war, is an occupation that is fraught with stressors, toxic exposures, hazards, and safety risks not commonly encountered in the civilian population, which can have detrimental effects on health of the military members, veterans, and their families.

Whereas, a majority of veterans in America seek and receive health services outside of the VA system, it is imperative that health care providers in the private sector become aware of their patients' military histories and the related health concerns resulting from that military service.

Whereas, the American Academy of Nursing is launching a new initiative to increase appropriate health care service delivery to individuals who have served in the military. This initiative includes informational materials designed to increase the awareness of health care providers at all levels about physical and mental health risk factors associated with military service. This will ultimately raise the quality of health assessments and, most importantly, appropriate diagnosis and treatment of the military members, veterans, and their families.

Whereas, members of the National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs (NASDVA) represent individual states, commonwealths and territories of this nation and are tasked with the responsibility to address the needs of veterans and serve as a focal point for information and assistance to veterans within the jurisdiction of their respective agencies.

Whereas, providers participating in "Have You Ever Served in the Military?" initiative are likely to identify veterans in need of assistance, information, and support that can be provided by members of NASDVA.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that NASDVA members actively support and assist the American Academy of Nursing's "Have You Ever Served in the Military?" initiative by providing contact information to members of the Academy and providers for referring veterans for assistance, information, and education about health concerns, benefits, and programs available to military members, veterans, and their families within their area of responsibility and jurisdiction.

Adopted by NASDVA at the annual conference in Nashville, Tennessee, on September 1, 2013.