



Using Energy Medicine to Support Healing in Veterans

Sue Walker, BSW, HTCP, CRM

American veterans are a very diverse population, women and men of all ethnic and socioeconomic groups ranging in age from 18 to the 100s. Two million Americans have served in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports that one in five suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In addition to the many stressors incurred in war, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), suffered by both women and men, has been identified as being a significant cause of PTSD. According to Stars and Stripes, 22 veterans commit suicide every day and PTSD is believed to be contributing to this.

These alarming statistics signal an immediate crisis that must be swiftly addressed. The VA recognizes that successfully dealing with this crisis will require civilian resources as well as offering treatment other than the traditional drug and talk therapy approach. Energy medicine therapies have been researched with veterans and have shown positive results in reducing pain, depression and anxiety. The VA is paying attention to how acupuncture, yoga, meditation, biofeedback, neurofeedback and other complementary therapy treatments can be used to improve veterans' lives.

The veteran population has a very high rate of suicide,

PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), depression, anxiety and severe joint/spine pain. Veterans across multiple generations have been dealing with these issues, and many have not had resolution in decades. Many have given up hope of living without physical or emotional pain. Energy medicine therapies often increase mind-body awareness and bring a new level of understanding, hope and healing to veterans who have been struggling through daily life. When an individual believes and embraces that they are in control of their health and destiny, new doors to healing open.

As Site Director of the Healing Warriors Program clinic in Fort Collins, CO, I have witnessed many of our veteran clients experience relief from long term physical and emotional pain. In the clinic we offer Acupuncture, CranioSacral Therapy (CST) and Healing Touch (HT) to veterans and active duty service members. These therapies were chosen for several reasons:

1. Their effectiveness with relieving pain, anxiety and emotional discomfort such as depression and anger.
2. The VA uses Acupuncture in some of their medical centers and has provided training in HT to many nurses.



3. There is published research where Acupuncture and HT has been used with veterans. (See references to research at the end of this article.)
4. Practitioners of these therapies are either licensed or certified, providing professional standards.

The clinic's clients range in age from 22 to 85, spanning WWII to the current wars. The most common complaints these veterans have is high levels of anxiety, anger and pain, primarily in their head, neck, back, shoulders and legs. A number of clients also report substance use and abuse that they would like to address. Many of the soldiers who have returned

area. Clients are valued and treated with respect, care and empathy. They are heard and validated, and this is very important in supporting them on their healing journeys. Clients have reported that the clinic is a sanctuary for them; that the services they receive are the best they have experienced in any veteran program; that the treatment sessions have changed their lives, and that they feel safe, nourished and nurtured.

Each client session is documented and pain, anxiety and emotional discomfort levels are captured before and after treatment. To date, findings show a significant reduction in both pain and anxiety for

Energy medicine therapies often increase mind-body awareness and bring a new level of understanding, hope and healing to veterans who have been struggling through daily life.

from Iraq and Afghanistan have suffered Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and MST. Some clients have been officially diagnosed with PTSD and others experience extreme emotional discomfort.

Each of the energy therapy modalities used are effective at easing and relieving the symptoms with which client's present, and the therapies complement each other extremely well. Most clients use a combination of the therapies because they receive different benefits with each therapy. Clients report that Acupuncture is very effective in relieving pain and anxiety; CST is particularly good at relieving headaches, spinal tension and TBI symptoms; and HT is wonderful for reducing anxiety and pain, and increasing peace of mind and relaxation.

The Healing Warriors Program clinic focuses on energy therapies and refers any talk therapy or mental health support to the many varied programs in the

each of the energy therapies offered. Healing Warriors Program is working on designing a model for research data collection and study around each of the therapies.

As more veterans return from Afghanistan in the upcoming months, it is vitally important that they be offered alternatives in treatment. This will support them in reintegrating into civilian life so that they can heal and lead happy, productive lives with their families. €

Energy Medicine Research Conducted with Veterans

The Efficacy of Acupuncture as a Treatment for Post Traumatic Stress in Military Personnel,

Sponsor: Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine; Collaborator: Federal government (congressional allocation)
Information provided by: Charles Engel, Uniformed



Services University of the Health Sciences
www.pdhealth.mil/downloads/Evaluating_the_Efficacy_of_Acupuncture_as_a_Treatment_for_Post-traumatic_Stress_in_Military_Personnel.pdf

Healing Touch with Guided Imagery for PTSD in Returning Active Duty Military: A Randomized Controlled Trial, Military Medicine, 177 (9), 1015-1021, T Jain, S., McMahon, G.F., Hasen, P., Kozub, M.P., Porter, V., King, R. & Guarneri, E.M. (2012).
www.ingentaconnect.com/content/amsus/zmm/2012/00000177/00000009/art00016

Acupuncture for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Trial, Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 2007 Jun;195(6):504-13, M Hollifield, N Sinclair-Lian, TD Warner, R Hamerschlag. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17568299

Study Descriptions of Healing Touch with Veterans Experiencing Chronic Neuropathic Pain from Spinal Cord Injury, Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing, Volume 4, Issue 3:187-195, May 2008, DW Wardell, D Rintala, G Tan. [www.explorejournal.com/article/S1550-8307\(08\)00068-2/abstract](http://www.explorejournal.com/article/S1550-8307(08)00068-2/abstract)

The Utility of Energy Therapy for Student Veterans at the University of Arizona, Disabled Veterans Reintegration and Education Project, Disability Resource Center, University of Arizona, June 2012, NA Rattray. <http://drc.arizona.edu/veterans-reintegration-education/sites/drc.arizona.edu.veterans-reintegration-education/files/color/The%20Utility%20of%20Energy%20Therapy%20for%20Student%20Veterans.pdf>