Royal College of General Practitioners
MIDLAND FACULTY

NHS England

Veterans' Healthcare Accreditation – FAQs

What is a veteran?

A veteran is anyone who has served for at least one day in the Armed Forces, whether regular or reserve. It means the same as 'ex service personnel'.

What is the RCGP advice on veteran's health?

The health needs of veterans can differ significantly to those of other patients. We would therefore strongly recommend you look at the e-learning for healthcare Armed Forces Programme.

E-learning programme to support improved care for serving personnel, veterans and their families

Health Education England e-Learning for Healthcare, with support from NHS England, has launched an e-learning programme to help increase understanding of the Armed Forces population and facilitate improved care and treatment. The programme covers current serving personnel, veterans and their families who are often referred to as the Armed Forces community.

Whilst many aspects of health need are the same as the general public, there are sometimes significant differences, particularly in relation to conditions attributable to service life and the impact upon families. These differences can be reflected in the way in which healthcare is delivered, the range and types of some specific services provided and the long-term impact upon patients and families.

What is the veterans' Read code?

As there are two versions of Read coding in use, we would recommend the practice code a veteran as "military veteran" then the computer system will code correctly on whichever version it uses.

What is the Armed Forces Covenant?

The Armed Forces Covenant sets the following goals with respect to healthcare:

- Members of the Armed Forces community should enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as received by any other UK citizen in the area where they live
- Personnel injured on operations should be treated in conditions which recognise the specific needs of Service personnel
- Family members should retain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the Service person being posted
- Veterans should receive priority treatment (subject to the clinical needs of others) in respect of NHS secondary healthcare relating to a condition resulting from their service in the Armed Forces
- Veterans should be able to access mental health professionals who have an understanding of the Armed Forces culture.

This is reflected in the NHS Constitution, which states 'the NHS will ensure that in line with the Armed Forces Covenant, those in the Armed Forces, reservists, their families and veterans are not disadvantaged in accessing health services in the area they reside'.

The Covenant is an important aspect of our approach to care, especially as the Armed Forces community can be at a disadvantage due to their mobility, and frequent moves etc.

What dedicated NHS services are available to veterans?

Veterans' mental health, transition, intervention and liaison service

There is a common perception that many military veterans have mental health problems, especially Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is incorrect and the prevalence rate is broadly comparable or less than civilian counterparts at 6%. Alcohol misuse amongst veterans is a bigger problem than PTSD. Having said this some veterans would benefit from a more specialised referral and especially to a service that understands the differences and culture of military life. GPs can either refer to their normal NHS services if this is the wish of the patient or alternatively to the veterans' mental health transition, intervention and liaison service (VMH TILS), which is for Armed Forces personnel approaching discharge, veterans and families.

Available across England, the service seeks to provide increased access and treatment to appropriate and timely mental health services, from recognising the early signs of mental health problems and providing access to early interventions, to providing therapeutic treatment for complex mental health difficulties and psychological trauma. In addition, patients are provided with help, where appropriate, with employment, reduction in alcohol consumption, and housing and social support.

The service comprises three elements:

1. **Transition**: **service for those in transition, leaving the armed forces**
   The service works with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to offer mental health support for Armed Forces personnel approaching discharge.

2. **Intervention**: **service for veterans with complex presentation**
   Service personnel approaching discharge and veterans will have an assessment within two weeks of a receipt of referral. If their needs are identified as more complex, they will be offered an appointment two weeks thereafter at the TILS. This will be with a clinician who has an expert understanding of Armed Forces life and culture. They may also be supported by a care coordinator who will liaise with other services and organisations to ensure a coordinated approach to their care.

3. **Liaison**: **general service for veterans**
   Patients who do not have complex presentations, yet would benefit from NHS care, will be referred into local mainstream NHS mental health services where they will receive treatment and support.

The VMH TILS in the Midlands and East of England covers the following areas: Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcestershire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The service contact is Diane Palmer. Referrals to this service can be made via email at mevs.mhm@nhs.net or telephone at 0300 323 0137. For information on the VMH TILS, please click here.

Veterans' mental health complex treatment service

Building on the success of this service, NHS England is in the process of procuring a veterans' mental health complex treatment service (VMH CTS) that will launch on 1 April 2018. The purpose of the VMH CTS is to provide an enhanced service for veterans who have military attributable complex mental health problems, many of whom will have experienced trauma, which have not been resolved earlier in the care/support pathway. Informed by the views of veterans and their families, the VMH CTS will focus on ex-service personnel who will benefit from the intensive provision of a range of mental health and social interventions. This may include (but is not limited to) support for substance misuse, physical health, employment, accommodation, relationships and finances, as well as occupational and trauma focused therapies. Accessing this service is via a referral to the VMH TILS (see above).

Veterans' trauma network

Following feedback from veterans, their families and GPs, NHS England has worked with the MOD and key military charities to launch the veterans' trauma network, which aims to provide specialist reconstruction care for patients with service related traumatic injuries and conditions. Located in ten major trauma centres across England (Plymouth, Oxford, London (three centres), Birmingham, Nottingham, Liverpool, Leeds and Middlesborough), the network links with the veterans' mental health, transition, intervention and liaison service and key military charities to provide a complete package of care.

Veterans can be referred to the service by their GP, BLESMA, Blind Veterans UK or Style for Soldiers, where they will benefit from specialist care by military and civilian experts in trauma. Patients using the service will have a personalised treatment plan that links to other services where required, such as rehabilitation and mental health, whilst families and carers will be supported to access services that they may benefit from. For more information or to refer a patient, email **england.veteranstraumanetwork@nhs.net.**

Prosthetics

A veterans' prosthetics programme was put into place to implement the key findings of '*A better deal for military amputees'* report by Dr Andrew Murrison MP.

Dr Murrison recommended that a small number of NHS disablement centres should provide specialist prosthetic and rehabilitation support to veterans to ensure that they continue to have access to high quality care similar to that which was provided to them whilst they were in the Armed Forces. Nine Disablement Service Centres (DSC) were selected to provide this support. The West Midlands Rehabilitation Centre run by Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is the centre in the West Midlands, although veterans are free to attend the NHS DSC of their choice.

In addition to providing support to nine DSCs, a veterans' prosthetics panel (VPP) was established in 2012. The VPP was designed to ensure that veterans could access high-quality prosthetics regardless of which DSC they attend. Applications for funding from the VPP are made by a veteran's prosthetist. More information on the VPP is available here.

Mobility Equipment Support

The Royal British Legion has a Veterans' Mobility Fund, which provides specialist wheelchairs, orthotic equipment and other mobility related items for veterans who have a service related serious physical injury and whose needs cannot be met through statutory services. Eligibility for the fund requires the condition to be attributable to service and typically applicants will be in receipt of a War Pension or relevant award under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. To find out more, visit www.rbl.org.uk/vmf.

NHS England's Veterans Covenant Hospital Alliance

The Veterans Covenant Hospital Alliance is in development and aims to select high quality hospitals who wish to ensure that the Armed Forces Covenant is fully followed and who use their trust-based experts (more often the Armed Forces Reserves Champion) to support patient needs across each site. For more information, email England.armedforceshealth@nhs.net or visit here.

The Armed Forces Healthcare Navigator Service

The Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) works in partnership with Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to deliver this dedicated and confidential service.

The role of the Healthcare Navigator is to provide confidential support, information and advice to all members of the Armed Forces community with any issues faced after service life.

The Healthcare Navigator can offer help with specialist healthcare, finance and benefits advice, charitable support, housing, employment and training and other welfare support where needed. The aim is to promote independence and improve quality of life, as well as improving awareness and support for the Armed Forces community within the primary care sector and strengthening links between the wider military community and GPs.

Veterans can be referred to DMWS or can contact DMWS directly. For more information, click here

More information on NHS services for veterans can be found on the NHS Choices webpage here.

What other services are available to veterans?

Veterans' Gateway
The Veterans' Gateway is made up of a consortium of organisations and Armed Forces charities, including The Royal British Legion, SSAFA – the Armed Forces charity, Combat Stress and Connect Assist. It is the first point of contact for veterans seeking support, putting them and their families in touch with the organisations best placed to help with the information, advice and support they need – from healthcare and housing to employability, finances, personal relationships and more. For more information, click here.

Contact
Contact is a group of charitable, support and state organisations that have joined forces to enhance mental health support available to the Armed Forces community. The partnership consists of Big White Wall, Cobseo, Combat Stress, Help for Heroes, The Royal British Legion, Walking With The Wounded, the NHS, MOD, UK Psychological Trauma Society and King's College London. Contact aims to improve collaborative care management, increase instances of help-seeking behaviour, improve service provision, encourage best practice across the sector and improve public knowledge of what support is available and how best to access it. For more information, click here.

Cobseo – the confederation of service charities
Cobseo, as the Confederation of Service Charities, offers membership to charities who promote and further the welfare and general interests of the Armed Forces community, subject to fulfilling the membership criteria. Comprising 255 members, Cobseo provides a single point of contact for interaction with the Armed Forces community. For more information, click here.

Help for Heroes
Help for Heroes was founded in 2007 to provide direct, practical support for wounded, injured and sick Service Personnel and veterans and their loved ones from any conflict. They have four recovery centres in the UK offering medical care, guidance, support and advice. Patients can self-refer or be referred by a professional. Once referred, an initial assessment will take place within one to two weeks and there is no waiting list for treatment. For further information, click here.

Combat Stress
Combat Stress is the UK's leading mental health charity for veterans. They provide free specialised clinical treatment and support to ex-servicemen and women across the UK with mental health conditions. Combat Stress has a strategic partnership with the MOD and the Department of Health. This enables them to work directly with NHS mental health trusts and Armed Forces Health Networks to develop services suitable for military veterans. For further information, click here.

Blesma

Blesma supports limbless veterans to lead independent and fulfilling lives. Blesma are dedicated to assisting serving and ex-service men and women who have suffered life-changing limb loss or the use of a limb, an eye or loss of sight. They support these men and women in their communities throughout the UK and provide centralised assistance to those living overseas.

Blesma works closely with the NHS to ensure the latest advances in the relevant medical fields are converted into practical solutions that can benefit all of their members. They do not provide members' prosthetics, but they do help prosthetists develop their skills at undergraduate and PhD level.

Anyone fitted for a prosthesis will know that the socket fit is paramount and it is often the cause of most issues. Blesma keeps up to date with developments in this area and encourages research and development, maintaining close links with NHS national teams, Defence Medical Services (particularly the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court) and industry. For further information, click here.

Hearing Loss and Tinnitus Services

If you have acquired hearing loss and / or tinnitus relating to your time in service, additional support can be funded through the Royal British Legion Veterans' Hearing Fund. To access the service, ask your GP to refer you to your local NHS audiology department or download an application form via the Veterans' Medical Funds webpage at www.rbl.org.uk/vmf.

What happens now I am accredited?

Once your application has been reviewed and accepted, you will then be sent a certificate to display in your practice, a poster to display with information for patients and a leaflet with information for your staff. A poster for your waiting room screen will be sent electronically, along with an accreditation mark and FAQs which provides all the information on the services available to veterans. The nominated lead for your practice will be sent updates with the latest information as and when they become available.

Will our accreditation be reviewed?

We will review your accreditation every three years. This will also give us the opportunity to review and update our information.