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“Personality Disorder”: A Deliberate Misdiagnosis To Avoid Veterans’ Health Care Costs!

House Veterans’ Affairs Committee finds that veterans given a Personality Disorder diagnosis by the military are unduly prejudiced when they seek VA health care and benefits

Washington, D.C. – Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) held a hearing to examine how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) addresses the military diagnosis of Personality Disorder. In the last six years, the military has discharged over 22,500 service members due to Personality Disorders. The Committee found that once a service member is diagnosed with a Personality Disorder, he or she has a much more difficult time receiving benefits and treatment at the VA.

Service members discharged due to a Personality Disorder, rather than PTSD or some other mental health condition, are generally not provided military disability benefits because the military classifies Personality Disorders as existing prior to entry into military service. The service member must show that his prior existing condition was aggravated or worsened by military service which is difficult to do. Service members can seek veterans’ disability benefits, but again they must show that their condition was aggravated by military service.

“Providing veterans with the correct medical diagnosis is important for a variety of reasons, ranging from receiving proper treatment to eligibility for military and veterans benefits,” said Chairman Filner. “My concern is that this country is regressing and again ignoring the legitimate claims of PTSD in favor of the time and money saving diagnosis of Personality Disorder. I am not satisfied with the standards by which the VA accepts or denies disability claims from our veterans diagnosed with Personality Disorders.”

Joshua Kors, a journalist that been reporting on Personality Disorder for the last ten months, stated that a Personality Disorder discharge is a “contradiction in terms. Recruits who have a severe, pre-existing condition like a Personality Disorder do not pass the rigorous screening process and are not accepted into the Army.” Kors interviewed soldiers that passed the first screening and were accepted into the Army. “They were deemed physically and psychologically fit in a second screening as well, before being deployed to Iraq, and served honorably there in combat,” said Kors. “In each case, it was only when they came back physically or psychologically wounded and sought benefits that their pre-existing condition was discovered.”

The committee also reviewed the recent report by the Institute of Medicine on VA Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) claims and discussed the VA's plan for implementation of recommendations in the report. Current estimates show that approximately one-third of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans may show signs of PTSD.

"The nation's veterans' health care system is strained to the breaking point," said Chairman Filner. "The Institute of Medicine reports that the VA needs to replace its narrowly defined and unevenly applied criteria for PTSD screening with broader standards based on the latest knowledge about psychiatry. I intend to work with the VA to address these recommendations and provide the appropriate care for our veterans."

Participants in the full committee hearing included: Colonel Bruce Crow, chief of the Department of Behavioral Medicine at Brooke Army Medical Center and clinical psychology consultant to the Army surgeon general; Jason Forrester, director of policy for Veterans for America; veteran Jonathan Town; journalist Joshua Kors; Paul Sullivan, executive director for Veterans for Common Sense; psychologist Tracie Shea, Ph.D. from the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinic at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center Providence, RI; Dean G. Kilpatrick, Ph.D., member of the Committee on Veterans' Compensation for PTSD at the Institute of Medicine; Sally Satel, M.D., resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute; and Ira R. Katz, MD, Ph.D from the Mental Health Veterans Health Administration at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.