

When the War Follows You Home

The growing problem with PTSD

Over 1.65 million United States soldiers have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan between 2001 and 2007[1]. In November 2007 estimates of soldiers returning home from the Iraq war with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) rose to almost 20%. That is equivalent to 330,000 soldiers returning to their families with war related mental disorders [2]. More staggering than these numbers is the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) inability to treat those soldiers so they can have a normal functioning life. The United States needs to be informed of the impact this war on terror is having on our young soldiers, and the reality that its effects will be felt for a lifetime. The progress we have made in this war is shadowed by the mentally-wounded society we have created at home. These effects on our American soldiers and their families alone should send a signal to the government that we have been in Iraq long enough. The United States should start taking care of its own people, like starting programs and funding treatments for our soldiers returning from war with PTSD. If the U.S. government does not address this issue with the VA we will see a whole generation of returning soldiers who cannot function in society as they had before they were sent to war.

The lack of proper treatment can be seen in a few local families who have suffered greatly from service connected disorders. Tom Vande Burgt and his wife Dianne have battled PTSD since Tom returned from Iraq in 2005. However it's not just the disorder they have been fighting, it is the treatment Tom received at the VA. After going to marital counseling for what they thought was just typical marital problems, Tom was diagnosed with PTSD. He had exhibited behavior such as anti-social behavior or disconnectedness, running red lights habitually, sudden burst of anger, all consistent with returning from war. When he went to his appointment at the VA center in Kanawha City he was prescribed anti-psychotic, anti-depressant, and anti-panic medications. However these drugs only made Tom emotionally numb and he became irritable and unpredictable as a side effect of his medication. The VA, he found out was understaffed and lacked the personnel to provide regular counseling. This has led the VA centers to medicate in place of counseling, a complete reversal of how to deal with PTSD [4].

Other soldiers who have received the same miracle pills from the understaffed VA have suffered greater than the Vande Burgt's. Janette Layne, wife of veteran Eric Layne, has shown videos of her husband slumped over at the table barely responsive as a result of the same PTSD medications. Jannette stated that her husband had "became lethargic, ate excessively, had tremors and slurred speech" all as a result of the VA's miracle drugs. Eric Layne died after falling asleep on his couch one evening. Eric is not the only veteran to experience this fate as the result of the medications. Andrew White was a former Marine who died in his sleep after taking the same medications Vande Burgt and Layne had been given as the VA's treatment plan [3]. Five such VA linked deaths occurred in West Virginia since the VA has started its medication regimens.

In conclusion, we send these soldiers to fight our wars and they face irreversible mental fatigue even after surviving the dangers of war. The Department of Veterans Affairs, an organization whose sole purpose is the well being and service to these veterans, is ill-equipped to treat the mental conditions those veterans are returning home with. Lack of staff, overwhelming numbers of affected veterans, and lack of funding all cause the VA to over-medicate. I believe we need to put more effort into the improvement of the services provided for veterans returning from a war we asked them to fight. I encourage everyone to write their legislature, congress, the VA, to provide the VA with better resources for our veterans. People need to get involved either by petitioning for better service or by volunteering to help with veterans and their families. There are many volunteer programs and support groups for those who are interested in helping. Lest We Forget PTSD support groups in Charleston West Virginia is a prime example of people helping people.

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Volunteers of America



[Visit the Volunteers of America of Kentucky Website](#)

"Lest We Forget"
PTSD Family and Military Support Group

<http://lestweforgetptsdsupport.org/>

Sources:

- [1] <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22451.pdf>
- [2] <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/565407>
- [3] <http://www.wvgazette.com/News/200904110217>
- [4] <http://wvgazette.com/News/200904110220>