



Iowa City VA Health Care System

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

VA uses web-based approach to reach UI Veterans and Military

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa City VA Health Care System and the University of Iowa have collaborated on a project to improve Veteran’s access to VA mental health care and awareness of UI resources available to Veterans on campus.

The two-year project is headed by Anne Sadler, Ph.D., Investigator, Center for Comprehensive Access and Delivery Research and Evaluation (CADRE) and Deputy Director of the Mental Health Service Line, Iowa City VA HCS; and Associate Professor, UI Carver College of Medicine, and Michelle Mengeling, Ph.D., Affiliate Investigator, CADRE, Iowa City VA HCS, and Research Scientist, UI Carver College of Medicine.

Sadler, Mengeling and their research team (including James Torner, Ph.D., UI College of Public Health, and Brenda Booth, Ph.D., University of Arkansas) developed web-based mental health outreach intervention studies in an effort to decrease barriers to mental health care that many Veterans face, including the lack of knowledge that symptoms that they may be experiencing are treatable mental health conditions.

This outreach uses web-based interventions that allow Veterans to go online and, at a time and place of their choosing, anonymously complete screenings for common mental health conditions or concerns (such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, intimate partner violence) and post-deployment readjustment concerns, if they have deployed (such as family readjustment).

“This VA-UI partnership uses technology to help Veterans confidentially learn about their possible care needs and the VA –UI resources available to help them,” Sadler said.

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After Veterans complete screening questions online, they receive immediate, confidential feedback about their personal screening results; information about the mental health conditions or readjustment concerns; and information about VA points of contact to help them access services as well as UI campus resources. This web-based educational interface does not take the place of face-to-face mental health care, but improves Veteran's knowledge about the symptoms they may be experiencing and decreases barriers to care and resources.

"Our prior research found that Veteran's liked online screening and information and were more willing to seek mental health services afterwards if needed," Mengeling said.

This is a collaboration between Iowa City VA researchers and The University of Iowa's Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Vice President, Georgina Dodge, Ph.D. and The UI Military and Veteran Student Services, headed by Allen P. Roberts, Jr.

This is an important undertaking as Military Veterans, using the educational benefits earned for their service, are enrolling in increasing numbers in academic institutions across the country. Approximately 1,400 Veterans are on the UI campus, including students staff, and faculty. All are eligible to participate. The number of Veterans at UI continues to grow each year, with many recently enrolled Veterans returning from combat deployments. Veterans will have access to these screenings and information throughout the school year and are encouraged to rescreen themselves whenever they choose, as mental health symptoms can change over time and life events and school can be stressful as well as positive.

The project is funded by the VA Health Services Research and Development, Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI,) Mental Health Office and CADRE. For more information about the project, call Anne Sadler at (319) 338-0581, extension 7992 or Michelle Mengeling at (319) 338-0581, extension 7703.