

Identifying patients with military service can improve health outcomes

July 11 2014, by Tyler Greer



UAB Medicine has partnered with Joining Forces, a government initiative that supports members of the military and their families by promoting various employment, education and wellness initiatives, in an effort to better identify and treat patients who serve or have served in the military.

Cheri Plasters, a University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing graduate and nurse in transplant and general surgical services in the Surgical Intensive Care Unit, will implement the "Have you ever

served in the military?" campaign at UAB. UAB Hospital providers will obtain a military health history if a patient affirms he or she is current or former military personnel.

Obtaining the military health history is vital, Plasters says, because it will enable clinicians to consider unique exposures and concerns of the veteran. The data will provide more effective specific educational materials and resources for veterans and bridge the opportunities to collaborate between UAB Medicine and the Birmingham VA Medical Center, but caregivers will find out their patient's service history only if they remember to ask.

"Every day we treat patients and have no idea if they have served our country," Plasters said. "I saw the need and wanted to do something, especially since the challenge relates to UAB Medicine's core values."

According to Plasters, only 20 percent of veterans are treated at VA Medical Centers, which means many are treated at clinics, hospitals and other organizations.

"By recognizing our servicemen and -women, we can improve their quality of life and overall health outcomes," she said. "That is why this initiative is so important. A military health history is at the core of planning the care of veterans."

The American Academy of Nursing is assisting on the wellness front by encouraging [health care providers](#) to ask patients if they have ever served in the military, which can reveal environmental and occupational realities that may factor into patient care.

"UAB wants to provide optimal care for every patient, and the plan of care is best when a full military health history is obtained from veterans," said Plasters.

UAB's School of Medicine and the School of Nursing offer programs to educate providers about the military health history importance and how to use it.

"The military health history covers all of the details for providers to ask and consider," Plasters said. "Physicians and mid-levels will use the military health history to guide their prescriptions and work with everyone else to address concerns and exposures, if that is an issue."

The intention is for all providers at all organizations and hospitals to use a military health history to help plan care, and a presentation has been scheduled for the Region 6 American Association of Critical Care Nurses conference in Atlanta this September.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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