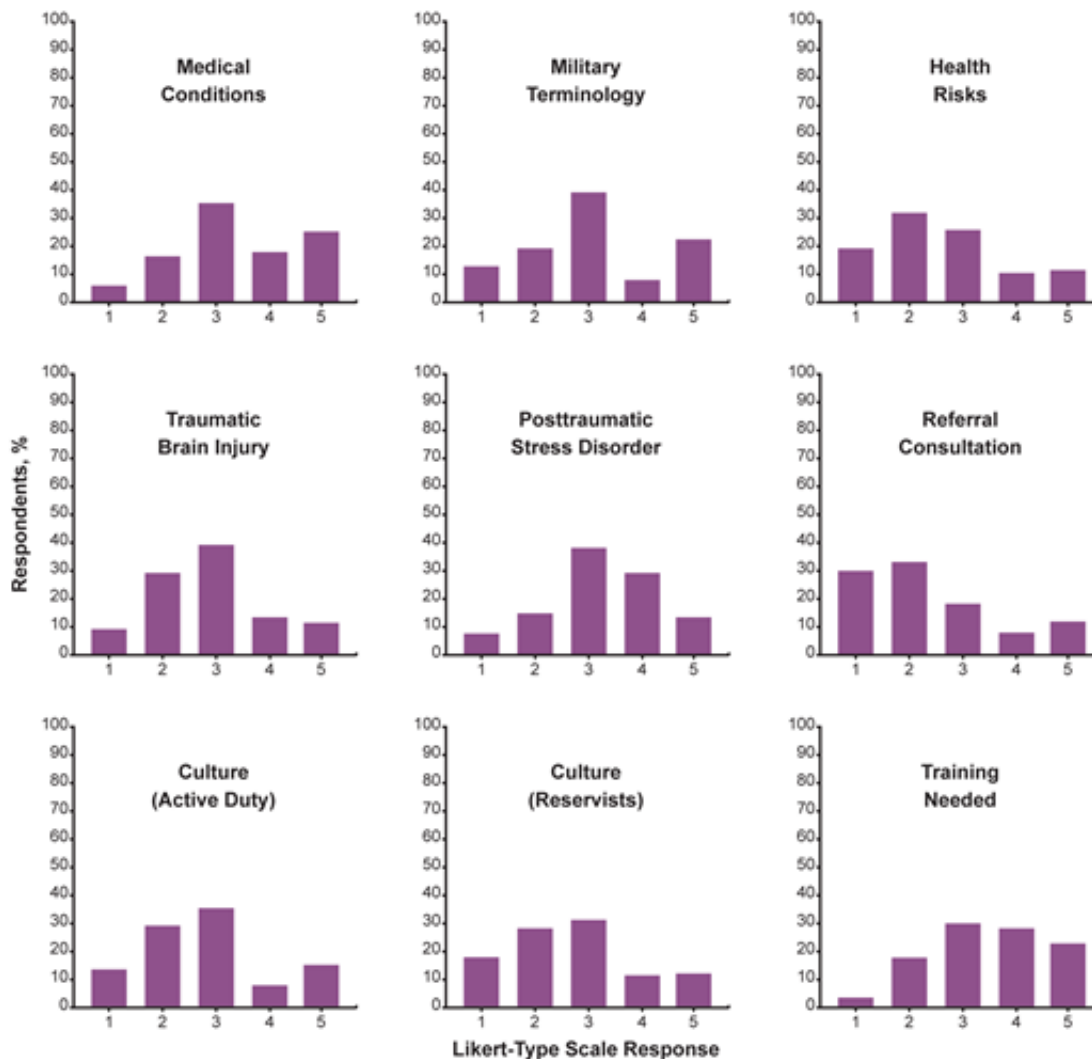


Survey finds civilian physicians feel underprepared to treat veterans

June 1 2015



This graphs shows the percentage of physician respondents to a survey about veterans' health care issues by survey item and item response. A rating of 1 indicated very uncomfortable/very unfamiliar/not at all; 3 indicated moderately comfortable/moderately familiar/somewhat; 5 indicated very comfortable/very

familiar/very much so. Credit: Journal of the American Osteopathic Association

A survey of nearly 150 U.S. physicians who frequently treat veterans found civilian doctors aren't adequately trained in health issues related to military service, according to research published today in *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*.

More than half of the respondent indicated they were not comfortable discussing health-related exposures and risks that veterans might experience such as depleted uranium, smoke and chemical weapons. Further, the survey indicated doctors needed more training to properly identify, communicate with and treat veterans who have military-related health conditions as more than 70 percent reported that they felt that they were between very uncomfortable and just moderately comfortable in this area.

The survey, which spanned two medical meetings in Ohio, involved 140 civilian [physicians](#) serving high levels of veterans, defined as at least one of five patients.

"None of the survey results showed an overall high level of comfort with veteran's [health issues](#)," said Todd Fredricks, DO, lead researcher. "Our research suggests civilian physicians need more resources to better understand the health implications of [military service](#), particularly since a large number of these patients have experienced combat and may face long-term physical and mental implications."

It's estimated that PTSD affects 31 percent of Vietnam veterans, 10 percent of Desert Storm veterans and as many as 10 percent of veterans of the war in Afghanistan. Yet, only 15 percent of physicians reported a high level of understanding of PTSD.

Furthermore, 80 percent reported unfamiliarity with the referral and consultation services for [veterans](#).

"Civilian physicians want resources and education that will help them provide the highest quality care to patients who've served our country and are in now in the prime of their lives, possibly with long-term health issues related to their military service," Fredricks said.

More information: Perceptions of Physicians in Civilian Medical Practice on Veterans' Issues Related to Health Care, *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*, June 2015, Vol. 115, 360-368. [DOI: 10.7556/jaoa.2015.076](#)

Provided by American Osteopathic Association

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