



Interview and Discussion Group Protocols for the Institute of Medicine Evaluation of the VA Mental Health Services

OMB No. 2900-0770
Estimated burden: 60 minutes
Expiration Date xx/xx/xxxx

The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995: This information is collected in accordance with section 3507 of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. Accordingly, we may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB number. We anticipate that the time expended by all individuals who complete this survey will average sixty (60) minutes. This includes the time it will take to follow instructions, gather the necessary facts and respond to questions asked. Customer satisfaction is used to gauge customer perceptions of VA services as well as customer expectations and desires. The results of this telephone/mail survey will lead to improvements in the quality of service delivery by helping to achieve services. Participation in this survey is voluntary and failure to respond will have no impact on benefits to which you may be entitled.

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IOM VA MH Services Evaluation
OEF/OIF/OND Veterans Who Are Not Using VA Behavioral Health Services
Discussion Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is _____ and this is my colleague _____. We work for Westat, a research organization based in Rockville, MD. Westat is under contract to the Institute of Medicine, part of the National Academy of Sciences, to undertake a Congressionally-mandated study assessing the array of mental health and substance use services available to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan through the VA, and to learn why some veterans, like yourself, have either never gone to the VA for these services, or went a couple of times and decided not to go back. Today we'd like to hear your experiences with or views on the VA and find out if there's anything you think the VA might be able to do differently to ensure that veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have access to needed behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and supports.

Before we get started there are a few things I should mention. This is a research project and your participation is voluntary. You don't have to answer any of our questions that make you uncomfortable and you can stop the interview at any time. We have planned for this interview to last no more than 60 minutes.

For this study, we will be going to all Veterans Integrated Service ["Health"] Networks across the country to see if there are common issues across geographic areas, or if there things being done successfully in some locations that could be tried in others. Once our visits are completed, we will submit our findings in a report to a committee that has been assembled through the Institute of Medicine; the committee will then incorporate our findings into a larger report that will go to the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Congress. It also will be released to the public. However, we will make every effort to keep the information you share with us private. We are not using any names in our report and our goal is to summarize findings such that comments cannot be attributed to a particular individual. The IOM staff and committee member who are joining us on each site visit have also agreed to maintain your privacy.

Do you have any questions? [ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS]

Finally, with your permission, we would like to record this interview. This recording will be used to help us recall exactly what was said when we go to summarize our findings. The recordings and any notes we have will be stored on Westat's server. They will be accessible only to the Westat project team. We will destroy the recordings after the study is complete. Are you okay with us recording?

IF PERMISSION WAS GIVEN TO RECORD ASK AGAIN IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS. ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS.

If there are no further questions or concerns, I'd like to start the audio recording now.

TURN ON RECORDER: For the purposes of the recording I am going to ask you to state if you are still willing to participate in this interview and if I have your permission to audio tape our discussion.

I. BACKGROUND

I'd like to start off by having you tell us a little about your military career. What year you enlisted; what branch of the service were you in; if you were in theater, when and where; and then how long ago you separated from the military.

Briefly, what's been going on in your life since you separated from the service? (Work? School? Married? Kids?)

II. EXPERIENTIAL NARRATIVE

As I mentioned, we're interested in learning about the mental health and substance use services the VA offers, and finding out why some veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan choose to get behavioral health assistance from non-VA providers. I'd like you to tell me a story about your experiences getting mental health or substance use services that you believe to be a good fit for you. I'm particularly interested in hearing about any experiences you may have had with behavioral health services through the VA or, if you never contacted the VA, why not. You can start your story wherever you like

and you can talk as long as you like, but tell me whatever you think is important for me to hear to understand your journey to getting mental health or substance use services with which you are satisfied.

POSSIBLE PROBES

- Thinking back, what led you to make that first phone call about getting mental health or substance use support? (Self aware? Family or friend said something?)
- What resources did you use to look for services? (Military One Source? Friend? Internet?)
- What, if any, experience did you have with the VA?
 - o IF NEVER CONTACTED THE VA, ASK WHY NOT. PROBE ON STIGMA, NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF VA SERVICES, ETC.
 - o IF WANTED BUT NEVER RECEIVED VA SERVICES
 - Why didn't you go through the VA for mental health or substance use assistance? (Long time to first appointment? Location where there was an available provider too far away?)
 - If [BARRIER DESCRIBED ABOVE] could be taken care of, would you consider the VA if you need behavioral health services in the future? Explain.
 - o IF RECEIVED SERVICES THROUGH VA BUT STOPPED
 - What was your experience with the services you received at the VA?
 - IF POSITIVE EXPERIENCE: Why did you stop?
 - IF BAD EXPERIENCE: What made it a negative experience?
 - If you were to need behavioral health services in the future, would you consider looking at the VA again? Why or why not?
- How did you determine that the [SERVICES CURRENTLY RECEIVING] are the best fit for you?

III. GOING FORWARD

What advice would you give to other veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who are looking for supports for a mental health or substance use disorder?

- Would you encourage them to contact the VA? Why or why not?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?
Thank you for your time.