

TOP 10 THINGS ALL VA STAFF SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)



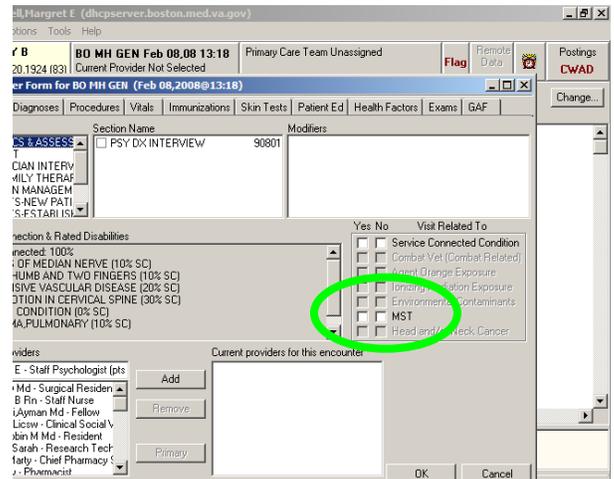
- 1. Military sexual trauma (MST) is sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that occurred during a Veteran's military service.** MST can occur on or off base and while a Veteran was on or off duty. Perpetrators can be men or women, military personnel or civilians, commanding officers or subordinates, strangers, friends, or intimate partners.
- 2. A significant number of men and women seen in VA report having experienced MST.** About one in five women and one in 100 men have told their VA healthcare provider that they experienced sexual trauma in the military. Though rates of MST are higher among women, because of the disproportionate ratio of men to women in the military there are actually comparable numbers of men and women seen in VA that have experienced MST.
- 3. Every VA facility has an MST Coordinator who serves as a point person for MST-related issues.** He or she can tell you about treatment and other resources available in your area. This facility's MST Coordinator is:
- 4. MST affects both mental and physical health.** Sexual trauma is more likely to result in symptoms of PTSD than are most types of trauma, including combat. Although MST can affect Veterans' mental health in a variety of overt and subtle ways, depression and substance abuse are particularly common. MST can also have severe consequences for physical health and is associated with higher rates of headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, sexual dysfunction, chronic pain, and chronic fatigue.
- 5. Like any other personal information, a Veteran's MST status should remain confidential.** Given that MST is a potentially sensitive topic area, healthcare providers and other staff should make extra efforts to respect Veterans' concerns about privacy.

6. VA Directive requires that healthcare providers screen all Veterans for MST.

Most Veterans won't disclose that they experienced MST unless asked about it directly. All VA healthcare providers should thus know how to screen for MST using the MST clinical reminder in CPRS. Information about how to screen can be found in the Provider Training & Education section on the MST Resource Homepage (see below.)

7. Treatment for all mental and physical health conditions related to MST is free.

Completing the MST clinical reminder in CPRS activates the MST checkbox in a Veteran's encounter forms, thereby giving him or her access to free MST-related care. It is up to the individual healthcare provider to determine whether a given visit involved treatment for conditions related to MST or not. If in his or her clinical opinion MST-related care was provided, this should be indicated by checking the MST checkbox on the encounter form associated with the visit. Checking this box notifies Billing that the Veteran should not be charged for the visit.



8. Veterans may be eligible for free MST-related care even if they are not otherwise eligible for VA services.

There are special eligibility rules associated with MST and many of the standard requirements related to length of service or financial means do not apply. Veterans do not need to be service connected, to have reported the incident(s) at the time, or to have other documentation that MST occurred in order to receive free MST-related care.

9. Treatment resources, patient education materials, and training opportunities are available on the MST Resource Homepage on the VA Intranet.

Visit <http://vaww.mst.va.gov/> for more information. More information is available on the Internet at <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp>.

10. As a representative of the VA, every staff member has the power to help Veterans recover from MST.

Veterans can be reluctant to disclose their experiences of MST or ask for help due to fear of others' responses. They may feel that hurtful and insensitive reactions of others can be as damaging as the MST itself. Every VA staff member has the power to alleviate these concerns and demonstrate VA's commitment to Veterans' recovery by responding sensitively to inquiries about MST, remaining knowledgeable about VA's MST-related resources, and ensuring that information about Veterans' MST status is kept confidential.

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