



**VA Health Care
Upstate New York**

Team Up With Us

For Immediate Release:

Samuel S. Stratton VA Medical Center
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Albany, NY 12208

Visit Us At www.visn2.va.gov

April 18, 2011

APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH (SAAM)



**VA Cares About
Military Sexual Trauma**

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is a term used by the VA to refer to sexual harassment or physical assault of a sexual nature that occurred during a Veteran's military service. MST can occur on or off base or while the Veteran is on or off duty. Perpetrators can be men or women, civilians or military personnel, officers or subordinates, strangers, friends or intimate partners. MST has occurred during all eras of service, both past and present.

Both Men and Women Experience MST. Identification of sexual trauma at the VA is accomplished by the MST Clinical Reminder. About 1 in 5 female veterans and 1 in 100 male veterans have experienced MST. Due to the higher number of males in military service, these ratios result in almost equal numbers of males and females reporting MST.

Why Should VA Staff Ask Vets About MST? Sexual trauma is associated with the development of physical and/or psychological symptoms. Chronic pain, gastrointestinal difficulties, sexual dysfunction and gynecological issues are common complaints of MST victims. In addition, increased frequency of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts or gestures are also associated with MST victimization. These behaviors and symptoms become more easily understood when viewed from the context of trauma history in the patient.

Asking about MST will communicate acceptance and strengthen the Veteran's trust that the VA is a safe and caring environment. Some patients will be open to discussing the topic of MST but rarely raise it unless specifically asked.

VA Provides Free Treatment for All Mental and Physical Health Conditions Related to MST:

- Veterans do not need a VA disability to receive care.
- VA has specialized outpatient, inpatient, and residential care available for MST survivors.
- MST survivors may request to speak with a clinician of a particular gender if this would be more comfortable for them.

All VA Staff Can Help Veterans Recover from MST:

- Respond with sensitivity to questions about MST or requests for treatment.
- Respect the Veteran's wish to withhold their name or other identifying information.
- Tell Veterans the MST Coordinator's name and extension before transferring the call.

Veterans and Other Individuals with Questions about MST Should Be Directed to the Albany VA'S MST Coordinator: Doreen Harris, Ph.D., 518-626-5405 or Pager: 6153

For more information, please visit <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp> or <http://vaww.mst.va.gov>, adapted from Depart. Of Veterans Affairs MST guide; VA Office of Mental Health Services MST Support Team 3/11 information re: MST.



Dr. Doreen Harris hosts a SAAM (Sexual Assault Awareness Month) & MST (Military Sexual Trauma) presentation for Stratton VA employees. Harris, a psychologist, is a member of the Behavioral Health in Primary Care Team and provides behavioral medicine consultation, cognitive-behavioral interventions and psycho-educational workshops within Primary Care settings.