



Position Statement on Mental Health Professionals Committed to Working with Service Members and Veterans

As the United States withdraws troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, we are faced with thousands of returning soldiers who are suffering from the mental health consequences of war. As psychoanalysts, we are aware that healing from the psychological consequences of war can be a long and difficult process extending years beyond the end of military engagement.

Studies indicate up to 30 percent of our returning troops have mental health symptoms. The most prevalent and often co-occurring diagnoses for returning soldiers are: PTSD/posttraumatic stress disorder (14 percent); depression (14 percent); and traumatic brain injury (19 percent).

While initial short term treatment can help relieve the symptoms experienced by soldiers upon the return from active duty, mental illnesses often persist, necessitating long term treatment. Psychoanalysis and psychodynamic psychotherapy, evidence-based treatment grounded in psychoanalytic principles, are relationship-based modalities that support the healing process by helping our soldiers and veterans move past their traumatic experiences and ahead with their lives.

Psychoanalysts have made significant contributions to the understanding of war-related trauma. Jones, Freud, Fairbairn, Kardiner, Grinker, Horowitz, and many others have greatly influenced how war-related trauma is understood and treated. In fact, current clinical knowledge regarding PTSD stems from psychoanalysts who worked with service members suffering from shell shock during and after the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam. Due to their in-depth understanding of people and their experiences, many psychoanalysts have successfully served as active duty clinicians.

One of the lessons analysts have learned from the past is that war trauma is not a solitary experience. Many families and communities are also significantly affected by the experiences of those who return. Children are particularly vulnerable, and may exhibit a variety of emotional and behavioral symptoms as a result of a parent's traumatic sequelae, a phenomenon referred to as the trans-generational transmission of trauma. Children can benefit from the play and talk therapies used in psychoanalytic modalities as a way to address the immediate effects of such trauma, as well as reducing the likelihood of a mental illness developing later in adulthood.

APsAA asks that the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs recognize that service members, veterans and their families will be best served when there is the option to follow up short term symptom reduction treatment with long term relationship-based therapy that can help veterans make sense of their experiences and help them learn how to rebuild their lives in the broadest sense. In order to better provide the benefits of techniques during treatment, both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs should ensure that clinicians are both supported and trained in providing relationship-based psychoanalytic therapies.

References:

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