



"Keeping the Promise"



# Stigma: Its Impact on the Returning Veteran

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# Learning Objectives

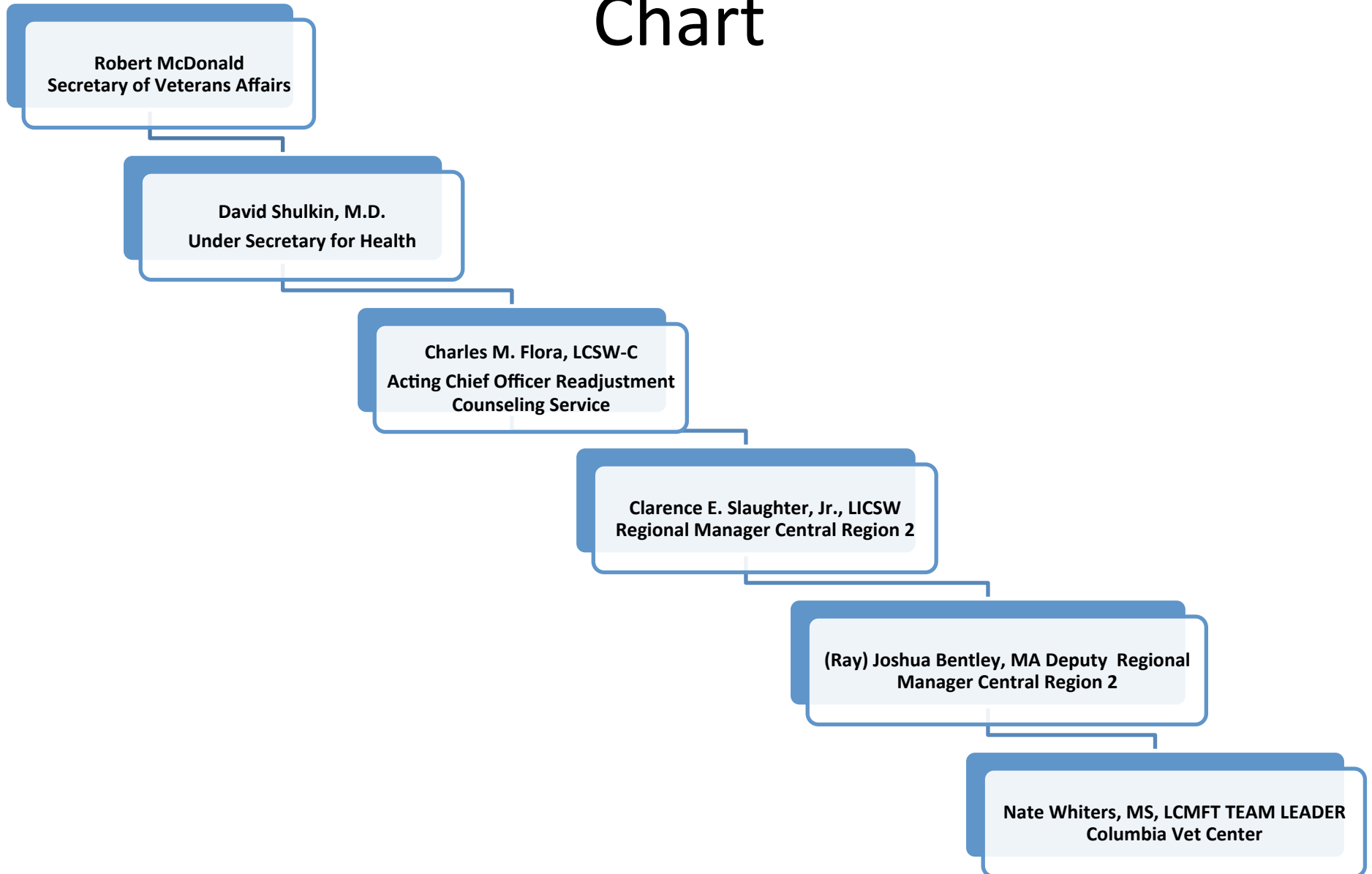
- Understand some of the particular strategies used in the support of military personnel, and persons experiencing trauma.
- Understand Readjustment Counseling Services and its role in reintegrating Veterans back into society.
- Understand experiences of combat and MST Veterans and their special needs for reintegration.
- Understand the stigma associated with Veterans returning from combat.

# Readjustment Counseling Service

Readjustment counseling is a unique VA service authorized by 38 USC, section 1712A. As designed by Congress and implemented by VA in 1979.

Readjustment counseling is a non-medical counseling service designed to assist combat Veterans overcome all barriers to care. This service enables them to sufficiently achieve a successful post-war adjustment.

# Readjustment Counseling Service ORG Chart



# Readjustment Counseling Service

VA Vet Centers are the service delivery sites for provision of readjustment counseling. Vet Centers are community-based facilities, located outside of the larger VA medical facilities, in easily accessible locations. Vet Centers are relatively small service units staffed by multidisciplinary teams consisting of:

- Team Leader
- Office Manager
- Three to four Counselors
- Outreach Specialist
- Mobile Vet Center Driver (Situational Dependent)\*

# Combat Experience

- Marines which way would in run Video (2 min)
- Feelings of intense fear
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Emotional numbing
- TBI

# Max Cleland

VA Administrator, 1978-1981 and Creator of the Vet Center program. Vet Centers help Veterans by assisting them with:

1. Telling the story
2. Finding meaning
3. Loving someone or something
4. Helping someone
5. Humor



# Military Sexual Trauma

## **Overcoming military sexual trauma (Video) 3 min**

MST is defined by Title 38 U.S. Code 1720D as “psychological trauma resulting from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the Veteran was serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training.” Sexual harassment is defined as “repeated, unsolicited verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which is threatening in character.”

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp>

# Stigma

A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person:

Synonyms of *stigma* in English  
shame, disgrace, dishonor...bad reputation

## Stigma's It

Martin Buber "I and Thou"

[http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/stigma](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/stigma)

# Stigma

## “Public Stigma

- Stereotype Negative belief about a group(e.g., dangerousness, incompetence, character weakness)
- Prejudice Agreement with belief and /or negative emotional reaction (e.g. anger, fear)
- Discrimination Behavior response to prejudice (e.g., avoidance, withhold employment and housing opportunities, withhold help)

## Self Stigma

- Stereotype Negative belief about self (e.g., character weakness, incompetence)
- Prejudice Agreement with belief, negative emotional reaction(e.g., low self esteem, low self efficacy)
- Discrimination Behavior response to prejudice (e.g., fails to pursue work and housing opportunities)”\*

\*Corrigan, P. W., & Watson, A. C. (2002). Understanding the impact of stigma on people with mental illness. *World Psychiatry, 1*(1), 16.

# Its Impact on the Veteran

“Stigma yields 2 kinds of harm that may impede treatment participation: It diminishes self-esteem and robs people of social opportunities.”\*

\*Corrigan, P. (2004). How stigma interferes with mental health care. *American Psychologist*, 59(7), 614.

# Its Impact on the Veteran

“Self-stigma was associated with a decreased likelihood of using mental health services for both female and male Veterans....

Concern about public stigma from either loved ones or in the workplace did not predict use of mental health care for either female or male Veterans.” \*

\* Vogt, Dawne S PhD BA (2012) Stigma, Gender, and Other Barriers to VHA Use for OEF/OIF Veterans, VA Boston Healthcare System Jamaica Plain Campus, Jamaica Plain, MA Boston, MA  
[www.hsrd.research.va.gov/hsrd/research/abstracts.cfm?project\\_id=2141698873](http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/hsrd/research/abstracts.cfm?project_id=2141698873)

# Its Impact on the Veteran

“Attitudes such as toughness, mission focus, and self and group-based sufficiency are instilled in service members to ensure combat readiness.

This belief system contributes to the notion that help-seeking is a sign of weakness and that strong, self-reliant individuals can “tough out” any problem or injury.”\*

\*Dickstein, B. D., Vogt, D. S., Handa, S., & Litz, B. T. (2010). Targeting self-stigma in returning military personnel and veterans: A review of intervention strategies. *Military Psychology, 22*(2), 227.

# Conclusion and Q&A

- Connect with your Vet Center  
(training)
- Listen to the Veteran  
(hear the story)
- Ask questions  
(assess for stigma's it)

# Reference

- Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration, Vet Center Handbook 15000.02, Readjustment Counselling Services (RCS) Vet Center Direct Service Mission and Operations Handbook , 1-3 August 2014.
- Corrigan, P. W., & Watson, A. C. Understanding the impact of stigma on people with mental illness. *World Psychiatry, 1*(1), 16-20, 2002.
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- Vogt, D. Mental health-related beliefs as a barrier to service use for military personnel and Veterans: Findings and recommendations for future research. *Psychiatric Services, 62*, 135-142, 2011.
- Vogt, Dawne S. Stigma, gender, and other barriers to VHA use for OEF/OIF Veterans VA Boston Healthcare System Jamaica Plain Campus, Jamaica Plain, MA Boston, MA Funding Period: September 2008 - March 2012. [www.hsrd.research.va.gov/hsrd/research/abstracts.cfm?project\\_id=2141698873](http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/hsrd/research/abstracts.cfm?project_id=2141698873)