

RCGP Veteran Accreditation – Autumn 2023 Newsletter

There are now over 2300 Armed Forces Veteran Friendly Accredited practices, which is over 36.5% of all 6353 NHS GP practices in England. Additionally, 76% of Primary Care Networks (PCNs) have at least one accredited practice.

Excellent veterans practice

Congratulations to Penhurst Gardens Surgery, Edgware, for their excellent work in the care of veterans. Their GP trainee, Dr Viner, successfully completed an audit to identify all their veterans. Interestingly, a significant number were found in the two care homes that the practice visits. Dr Viner led on Penhurst Veterans Day on Tuesday 16 May 2023 to increase staff awareness with posters and an educational event at the practice to help identify more veterans and families. This will now be an annual event. The practice has also appointed an RAF veteran to their Patient Participation Group. Well done, Penhurst!

It is useful to remember that conscription for National Service ended in 1963, so any male over the age of eighty is likely to be a veteran. Have you thought of asking your patients over the age of eighty whether they ever served in the Armed Forces?

LGBT veterans independent review publication

The report into the treatment of LGBT service personnel prior to lifting the ban on gay people serving in the British Armed Forces in 2000 has been published ([LGBT Veterans Independent Review - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118444/LGBT_Veterans_Independent_Review_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)). The review, chaired by Lord Etherton, examined the lived experience of personnel and made subsequent recommendations to the government. Some of those who offended against the policy of the Ban were either dismissed following a court-martial or administratively discharged. There were others who could not take the strain and stress of continually hiding their sexuality, and so resigned or did not extend their contract. The policy was not enforced uniformly across the armed forces but, where it was enforced, it was usually enforced in a rigorous and brutal way with long-term damaging consequences, blighting the lives of many affected personnel to this day. It is quite likely that the publication of this report may be upsetting and for some may trigger memories of their experience. Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service is available for any veterans or reservists who are affected by the publication of this report. Details can be found at www.nhs.uk/opcourage.

Op FORTITUDE

Veterans across the UK will have access to Op FORTITUDE, a new dedicated referral pathway for homeless veterans, including those sleeping on the streets. The housing hotline, delivered by Riverside, will give homeless veterans a single point of contact to get them the help they need. Op FORTITUDE staff will refer callers to a network of support, including housing providers, charities, and local authorities. The programme aims to support 1,300 veterans over two years across almost sixty housing complexes, ranging from apartment blocks to shared houses. Veterans can access the scheme through a dedicated helpline on 01748 833797 or complete a [referral form \(site.com\)](#).

Op RESTORE: The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service – the new name for the Veterans Trauma Network (VTN)

After a review and engagement with veterans, providers, and charities over several months, the decision was made to rename the VTN as Op RESTORE. This is a service for anyone who has served at least one day in the UK Armed Forces and, because of their service, acquired a significant and lasting physical illness or injury. Op RESTORE will continue to accept only GP referrals; GPs can obtain a referral form by emailing imperial.oprestore@nhs.net, or using the form attached to the email accompanying this newsletter.

More information about resources to help veterans, reservists or a family member of someone who is serving or who has served, can be found at: [Healthcare for the armed forces community - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk).

New podcast

We have been busily creating new resources for you since our last newsletter. In our [new podcast \(audioboom.com\)](https://audioboom.com), Dr Emily Brookes talks to Beth Lambert, National Service Lead for Op RESTORE, and Mr Shehan Hettiaratchy, National Clinical Director for Op RESTORE, about how this veteran-specific referral pathway can break down barriers in accessing physical healthcare for veterans. They discuss how and when to access the pathway, and the benefits to both the veteran and the primary care teams supporting them.

New webinar

As well as a new podcast, we have a [new webinar \(elearning.rcgp.org.uk\)](https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk). Social Prescribers offer non-medical, holistic support to everybody referred to them, but a recent pilot in the South West of England coupled with the pandemic revealed just how much difference people in this role can make to veterans. Dr Emily Brookes meets Liza Jarvis, Senior Programme Manager (South West NHS England) and Becky Ormrod, Armed Forces Social Prescribing Link Worker, to discuss the pilot project and provide insight to NHS GPs and primary health care teams about the important role social prescribers can play in improving healthcare for veterans.

Hearing study on veterans

The Royal British Legion have funded the University of Chester to determine the impact of hearing impairment on working age military veterans (16-67 years old) gained as part of their service or whilst in service. If you know of veterans who would like to be part of this study, then please visit [RBL Hearing Survey \(onlinesurveys.ac.uk\)](https://onlinesurveys.ac.uk).

Practice reaccreditation

Over the next few months, we will contact you to find out if we still have the right clinical lead details for your practice. Please do not use the online accreditation scheme application form to let us know if your clinical lead changes; email us at veterans@rcgp.org.uk instead.

Share your experience as a veteran friendly practice in the lead-up to Remembrance Day

We would love to hear about your experience of being a veteran friendly practice and any interesting case studies you might have. If you would like to share your experience with us, please complete the [Veteran Friendly Practice case study form \(rcgp-news.com\)](https://rcgp-news.com). If you're happy for us to share your comments in our marketing materials, we'd really appreciate it if you could email a high resolution photograph of yourself to veterans@rcgp.org.uk as well.

Please help

The Armed Forces Veteran Friendly Practice Accreditation is mentioned in the LGBT Veterans Independent Review, which recommends that NHS England, Integrated Care Boards and the RCGP should explore ways to encourage more practices to become accredited.

Please spread the word to raise the profile of this important accreditation initiative to neighbouring practices and through Primary Care Networks (PCNs), Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), and Local Medical Committee (LMC) networks. Should you require any further information or resources, please contact us at: veterans@rcgp.org.uk.

Brigadier (Retd) RG Simpson FRCGP and ER Brookes MRCGP
RCGP Veterans Champions
Oct 2023