

# **Military Culture: Core Competencies for Healthcare Professionals**

## **Culturally Competent Behaviors for**

### **Military Organization and Roles**

#### **Key Functions and Roles in Military Organizations**

- Sometimes seemingly innocuous behaviors can be perceived as being very disrespectful by Servicemembers, such as ways in which you address patients, or ways in which patients can be depersonalized by staff in health care settings. Establishing respect is as important as establishing trust with SMs and Veterans.
- You may need to gather information from other sources about your patient's particular experiences in the military (i.e., the unique ramifications of their particular job, their branch of service, the risk factors associated with their particular job).

#### **Military Career Continuation Decisions**

Your patient may not feel ready to discuss the most difficult aspects of their service, for many possible reasons, including, but not limited to:

- They have beliefs about not talking about it with anyone other than a fellow Servicemember
- They have beliefs that it is better to "leave it behind."
- It causes them too much distress to recall.
- They don't feel comfortable discussing it with you.
- They don't feel it is necessary or important to discuss.

You may have to determine the reason behind their not wanting to discuss their experiences, or find a way to work up to discussing the experiences if the treatment protocol calls for it.

#### **Injury or Illness**

- When discussing injury or illness, end your discussion with more positive possible ways to move forward, and discussion of strengths and resources.
- Ask the patient what kind of job he/she had on active duty and what duties and tasks were involved.
- Assess how patients' unique experiences of military organizations and roles over their life spans may operate either as protective factors or risk factors with respect to health and well-being.
- Look for the key themes of belonging, obligations to others, relationships of responsibility and authority, veneration for customs and traditions, and the uniqueness of military lifestyles.
- Study and learn the basics of military culture to be able to converse knowledgably with patients about the military lifestyle.
- Ensure patients who transferred from DoD arrive in your care with complete records and documentation.
- Make certain medical profiles are sufficiently detailed to facilitate diagnosis and treatment.
- End your patient interaction with by discussing more positive possible ways to move forward, the patient's strengths and resources, and then the patient's injury or illness.