

# Partnership Through a Pandemic: Supporting Veterans & Care Partners Through Alzheimer's Disease

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# Alzheimer's Association of Northeastern New York

- Voluntary Health Organization with a Chapter office based in Albany
- Covers a 17-county area in northeastern most corner of NYS (15K miles in total).
- More than 50,000 friends and neighbors living in our in this area have Alzheimer's disease.
- Provide care and support with our 24/7 Helpline, Care Consultations, Support Groups, and Education Programs

# Strategic Objectives

- Increasing concern and awareness.
- Advancing public policy.
- Enhancing care and support.
- Accelerating research.
- Growing revenue support of the mission.



# VA Mission:

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To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan –  
~Abraham Lincoln

...by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

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# Influence of Military Culture

Military training encourages courage, toughness, and denial of emotion:


- Big boys don't cry.
- No pain, no gain.  
(Marine slogan: "Pain is weakness leaving the body")
- Fear and pain are signs of weakness.
- Once a Marine, always a Marine.
- Stoicism: stubborn pride, control that conquers, fierce independence
- Biggest influence: COMBAT

# PTSD and Dementia

- Individuals with PTSD are nearly twice as likely to develop dementia (Qureshi et al, 2010; Yaffe et al, 2010)
- PTSD symptoms are more severe in individuals with dementia (Hamilton & Workman 1998; Johnston, 2000).
- Common Triggers for PTSD in those who need dementia-related support:
  - Being bathed
  - TV shows/Movies related to trauma (war movies)
  - Smells (bodily smells, wounds, fires, certain foods)
  - Sounds (songs, foreign languages, alarms, loud noises)
  - Any physical touch, especially if unexpected
  - Night awakenings

# Impact of Military Service on Families

- Whole family experience
  - authoritarian family dynamics
  - frequent moving
- Battlemind training
  - inner strength to face fear and adversity with courage
  - “no pain, no gain”, suppressing emotions
- Deployment and Combat
  - redefining identity role and purpose (war to peace)
  - roller coaster for family
- Discharge or Retirement
  - transition to civilian life



## What makes the VA different?

- Military culture: comradery, sense of belonging
- Long term relationships with staff
- Most care in one place
- With multiple providers in one place – meetings/discussions with multiple providers is a common occurrence



# Facilitating Our Relationship

- Historically worked together
- Saw value in combining education and social supports along with clinical treatment
- Was able to secure funds from a private donor to start a pilot phase of a more formalized and strategic partnership
- Collaborative Action Plan

# Collaborative Action Plan Highlights

- Movable target with check-in dates
- Created a movable and flexible outline to focus on 3 key areas of partnership:
  - Staff Engagement
  - Care and Support
  - Improvement of Dementia Care

# Staff Engagement

- Focus on building staff knowledge and awareness of dementia-related resources for caregiver support, which will improve patient care, provide support for caregivers, and expand awareness throughout the VA system
  - **AA Role:** participate in VA resource fair and offer education to VA staff
  - **VA Role:** scheduling caregiver resource fair and plan education workshops as appropriate

# Care and Support

- Enhance education for those living with dementia & their care partners and provide improved care for veterans living with dementia
- Focus on linkage to support services for vets and their families as well as behavior management

# C&S: AA and VA Responsibilities

- **AA role:** participate in VA led Caregiver Summit, share education and direct referral opportunities for families affected by dementia, and schedule AA staff training with VA staff
- **VA role:** Plan Caregiver Summit, lead review for referrals to AA, share AA education programs, and share tools & tips on engaging with vets and their caregivers to local AA staff

# Improvement of Dementia Care

- Improve timely detection, care management, and person-centered care for people living with dementia using Dementia-Care Practice Recommendations into care action
  - **AA role:** Use Health Systems Director as resource for quality improvement and provide EssentiAlz training opportunities to VA staff.
  - **VA role:** Share professional education opportunities to system and facilitate introductions to VA Dementia Steering Committee



VA

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# Examples of Partnership Successes: Consultative Approach

- **Albany County**


- Son looking for support regarding his father, a veteran, who is experiencing dementia.
- The veteran is experiencing combative behavior. He is verbally abusive and has recently become physically abusive towards his wife when she took the keys away. The son was feeling lost with how to control the situation.
- AA staff provided education on communication, behaviors, and driving. Also, support groups were provided for the son and wife. AA and VA staff had a collaborative meeting together after initial visit from AA staff, to work on providing supports together for this difficult situation.

- **Washington County**

- A wife is caring for her husband, a veteran, who has vascular dementia.
- He has become more violent and has “outbursts” from his diagnosis, this mainly stems from paranoia about selling their home in FL to move to NY.
- She has some help (6 hours per week) to get errands done, but feels completely overwhelmed and isolated from COVID-19.
- AA staff provided support and education on communication, referred the individual to an education about “Meaningful Engagement”, and provided information on local support groups.



# Example of Successes: 2021 Caregiver Summit



**VIRTUAL**

**2021 Caregiver/Mental Health Summit**  
**Wednesday, June 2nd**  
(CEUs Pending)

11:00am Inclusive Care: Empowering & Engaging Caregivers as Partners in Care

12:00pm National Alliance for Mental Health : Partnering With Caregiver in Mental Health Setting

1:00pm Alzheimer's Association: Brain Health

# Internal Structure: AA

- Focused on the local Program Managers in each one of our 17 counties, to work with each veteran and their families for the consultative approach. Benefits included shared workload and expertise in the veteran's community.
- Director of Education & Outreach and AD of DEI Initiatives focused on professional education and caregiver outreach event.

# Internal Structure: VA

- Presented to Community Living Center Staff, Alzheimer's specific certification (essentiALZ). Reviewed available services, care consultation/family liaison partnership. Benefit – expanding resources where they had not previously existed.
- Focused on primary care, educate MDs about services, rely on social workers to identify veterans in the community who would benefit from the partnership.

# Benefits of Collaboration

- Closes the loop between social support and clinical care
- Partners can lean on one another for own areas of expertise
- On-going professional education for VA and AA staff in areas of expertise
- Support for all staff members and the families they serve

# Thank you!

## Any Questions?

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