# Investigating Veterans' Experiences with the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Care

**Smith, A. 1, Rodriguez-Paras, C. 1, Sasangohar, F. 1,2, alec.smith@tamu.edu; caro.rod@tamu.edu; sasangohar@tamu.edu;**

1 Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering, Texas A&M University; 2 Houston Methodist Hospital

## 1. BACKGROUND

### Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Occurs after experiencing traumatic event
- Characterized by intrusion of negative thoughts, feelings, avoidance, hyperarousal
- Veterans particularly susceptible (APA, 2013)
- Comorbidities of vets: anxiety, depression, emotional distress, social isolation, physical disabilities (Plach et al., 2013; Yarvis & Schiesa, 2008)

## 2. DATA COLLECTION

### Interviews with PTSD veterans
- 50 veterans recruited from a bike-riding program across several states over 3 years
- Questions about experiences living with PTSD, treatment care and quality
- Interviews transcribed and validated
- Participants compensated for participation
- IRB approval obtained

## 3. ANALYSIS

### Code Development
- Review protocol and create codes based off themes and topics

### Initial Coding
- Categorize segments of text into codes
- Create new codes as necessary

### Focused Coding
- Review initial codes
- Create more specific subcodes

### Code Discussion
- Discuss code creation and coding process
- Discuss thematic elements

### Report Results
- Create visualizations based off of relations between codes, quotes and themes

### Findings:
- **Positivity** indicates the positive attitudes and lack of complaints some veterans had concerning VA care
  - **SUGGESTION:** Continue providing excellent care for the veterans
  - “So far it seems to be headed in the right direction. I mean at least we’re in a direction so that’s helpful for me.”
  - “I had a really good doctor who helped me get into the therapy and get into some programs that I needed”

- **Inconsistent Care**
  - “There is no follow up and it’s just me in a distressed situation.”
  - “They always want to change and put me on this new drug or on a stronger drug and I keep having to, even with my psychiatrist now... the hardest thing has been pushing back on drugs.”
  - “I have moved around and I have used a lot of different VA’s over the years. And getting in is always challenging”
  - “I have been involved with about seven different VA’s... each one handles the, the system is different. So every time I go to a new one... starting all over again and that can bring on new symptoms and new issues and so continuity I think that is the biggest thing that could be improved.”

- **Inconsistency** describes the lack of consistent treatment between different VA clinics; many of the veterans move and experience different levels of quality, ranging from poor to good, in their treatment between different VA clinics
  - **SUGGESTION:** Create a unified training program for VA clinic personnel for consistency between clinics
  - “I can say I have never seen the same doctor twice.”
  - “If I didn’t have to switch therapists all the time... that if I saw the same therapist more than once or more than two times or three times and then switch to another person, I think it would be better”

- **TREATMENT QUALITY** concerns the treatment of health care issues alongside the personal interactions with VA clinic personnel
  - **SUGGESTION:** Create a unified training program for VA clinic personnel for consistency between clinics

- **Turnover**
  - “And then since I can’t afford it, I’m going through the VA.”
  - “It’s the distance that’s a challenge. It’s about 60 miles away.”

- **SCHEDULING** concerns the issues associated with wait times for first appointments, wait times in between sessions, lack of available clinicians, and cancellations
  - **SUGGESTION:** Improving logistics of patient treatment to address scheduling problems through software solutions or additional staff

## 5. FUTURE WORK
- There exist many opportunities for improving veteran’s experience of VA care
  - Future work may involve
    - Interviewing additional veterans and VA staff to confirm these findings
    - Implementing some of the suggestions in a small-scale study before moving to a large-scale implementation

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For more information about this work, please contact Dr. Farzan Sasangohar at sasangohar@tamu.edu