Investigating Veterans' Experiences with the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Care

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INDUSTRIAL & SYSTEMS ENGINEERING

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 & Schiess, 2008)

PTSD Treatment

- Many veterans seek treatment in Veterans Affair (VA) clinics throughout the USA.
- Pharmacotherapy & psychotherapy
- Aside from shortcomings these treatments may have, patient-centered issues exist

Understanding VA Care

- Previous work focused on quantitative approach but has limitations (Duffy, 1987)
- Recent work shows the benefits of qualitative approach to understanding veteran perspective of care (Bovin et al., 2018)

Study Aims

(1) Identify and specify the positive features in VA clinics from the veterans' perspectives

(2) Determine the negative features in VA care from the veteran's perspective

(3) Recommend modifications to improve care for veterans

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

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

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Focused Coding
- Review initial codes
- Create more specific subcodes

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

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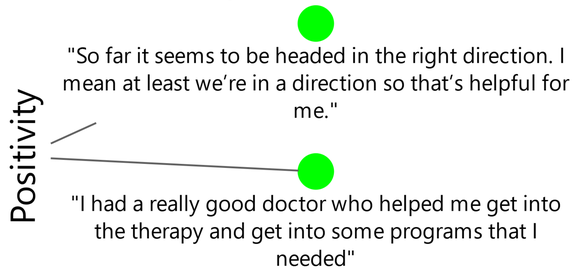
Report Results
- Create visualizations based off of relations between codes, quotes and themes

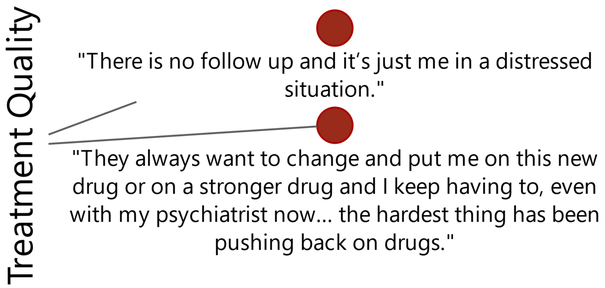
4. RESULTS & IMPLICATIONS

The visualizations presents six themes with examples from the participants.



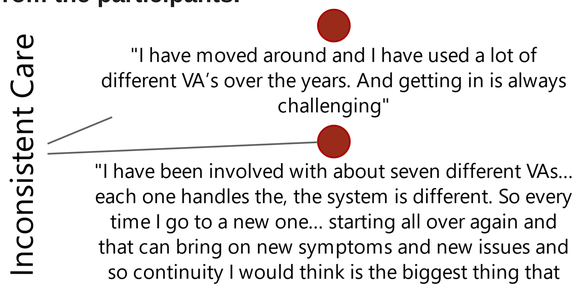
POSITIVITY indicates the positive attitudes and lack of complaints some veterans had concerning VA care

SUGGESTION: Continue providing excellent care for the veterans



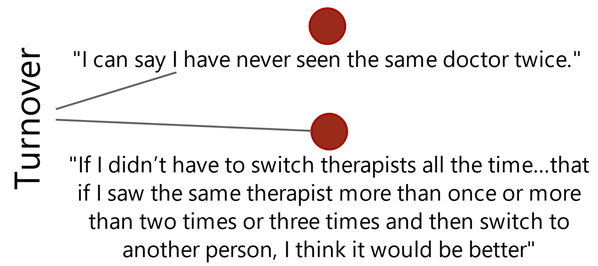
TREATMENT QUALITY concerns the treatment of health care issues alongside the personal interactions with VA clinic personnel

SUGGESTION: Create a unified training program for VA clinic personnel for consistency between clinics



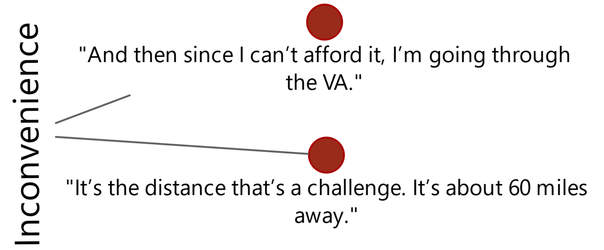
INCONSISTENCY describes the lack of consistent treatment between different VA clinics; many of the veterans move and experience different levels of quality, ranging from poor to good, in their treatment between the clinics in different areas

SUGGESTION: Create a unified training program for VA clinic personnel for consistency between clinics



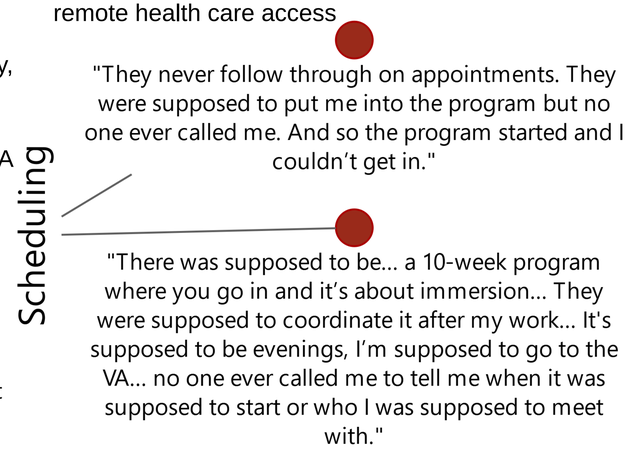
TURNOVER describes the frequent departure and replacement of VA clinicians

SUGGESTION: Provide incentives for health care personnel to stay at the VA clinics



INCONVENIENCE describes the location and difficulty of access to treatment

SUGGESTION: Expand VA locations or provide remote health care access



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

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