

Statement for the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Access to Mental Health Care, PTSD, TBI and addressing the Challenges and Barriers for Veterans

To The Hearing Panel,

April 17, 2014

In 1989, I was stationed in the US Army at Ft Riley, Kansas. During my time there, I was attacked by three male soldiers, grabbed and pulled in a room. I was forcibly held down by two of the males while one forcibly raped me. I was then raped by the second male. The third male did not do anything except hold me while this was going on. I was told that if I said anything I would be killed. I was in so much pain and shock that basically I was dragged to the stairs and was thrown down a flight of stairs (20 stairs) and left alone. I passed out and woke up by the cadre, I could not move so they sent me to the hospital on base. I became paralyzed emotionally, which I literally had to have a cattle prod taken pressed on my feet to bring me out of the paralyzed condition.

At this time I was so ashamed about what happened that I did not report this incident and I even told my father that I had slipped down some stairs and broke my arm. In 1990 I was discharged from the army. So for the next 16 years I kept this to myself. I was married, had three children and one night because of a nightmare, something snapped within me. The nightmares became so bad, that I could not sleep and literally I was a walking zombie for not allowing myself to sleep. Finally after 6 years, I started seeing a nurse practitioner - counselor at the Show low VA. I told her my story and after a year, she left and to see someone else, I would have to start all over again, which I just couldn't do. So after about a year and a half, my wife encouraged me to seek help. I was not really wanting to talk to a male doctor about my experiences, I wasn't getting any better, so I did go back to the VA, I saw a Physician (Dr. Davis), he could prescribe medications, so I continued to see Dr. Davis for almost two years. This was a one on one counseling visits. This time, I was recommended by Dr Davis to submit for PTSD, Depression, unemployable which he documented and I can also add that in his notes he related the MST (Male Sexual Trauma). I was denied PTSD relating from the MST due to lack of evidence. However I was service connected for depression (100%) temporary to be reevaluated after two years. I was originally denied social security disability twice which took over another two years to get that approved through the use of a lawyer. This was because I could not work and was already diagnosed as chronic depression by the Veterans Administration.

I lost my family and found myself living in a cabin as a recluse in Show low almost two years. Before the cabin, I lived in a room in my ex-wife's home which I shut myself in and went out only after people were not around. I shopped at Walmart at 2 am so I did not have to see people. I would go fishing at daybreak before anyone would be there.

In August of 2010, my son serving in the Army had been wounded in Afghanistan. I spent from August 2010 to November 2010 at Brooke Army Medical Center during his recovery. It was just me there for him. We had a lot of time to talk, but one of the last things he said to me during these conversations was, Dad, promise me that you go seek help, which I did after returning to Sholow and contacted the Tucson VA. I requested to make arrangements to get into the inpatient substance abuse program. February 2011, was the quickest time that I could go there, which I did. I stayed inpatient for 3 months

and was finally able to get into the MST inpatient group, which is a one year program. So after being inpatient for 3 months at the VA medical center, I then left and would live in Casa Grande. I would commute once a week to Tucson for my group sessions. I did this for 9 months. The group counseling was very intense, starting with a group of eight male veterans ranging from the Korean War, Vietnam and current war. We ended with 3 finishing the program due to the intensity and having to relive the actual experiences.

Currently, today I see a therapist at the VA CBOC Clinic in Casa Grande averaging every two weeks since October of 2013. I have submitted three times to the Veterans Administration for PTSD relating to the MST. I have been denied three times because of lack of evidence. I did not speak up when this rape occurred. I was too ashamed. I want to acknowledge the Veterans Administration for finally recognizing that Male Sexual Trauma is and has been an ongoing problem. However being recognized is one thing, not being service connected and compensated with benefits is another. This feels that it is a slap in the face like it never happened. If it is only being recognized for treatment, then the VA is only putting a band aide on the problem. I am speaking for all male veterans who are going through these difficult experiences of male sexual trauma. I realize that MST is very difficult for anyone to talk about. But more and more, we are now seeing these experiences come out in the limelight. What is needed now? We need fair evaluation of personal stressors and physician diagnoses to service connect and give our veterans benefits what they deserve and most important need.

I would also like to comment on the Veteran Access to medical care especially in the rural areas based on my experiences. I first want to bring up that when I was in the MST program for that 9 months in outpatient I had to drive 70 miles one way to attend sessions (Casa Grande to Tucson), this is 140 miles roundtrip. Even today, to continue the MST individual or group counseling I would have to still drive that distance. The program is good, the distance is not for any veteran in this situation. I might add, even in Show low, if it was to see a specialist for my knee or shoulder, I would have to travel to Phoenix, which was almost 400 miles roundtrip. Living in a rural area, I would like to see more specialist and physicians that can do immediate care, not having veterans constantly trying to get appointments. I would like to see a fully staffed VA Clinic and maintain that VA staff to assure myself and all veterans quality health care in a reasonable time frame. I also recommend a VET Center in this area that veterans can go to and seek counseling for PTSD, TBI, Sexual trauma and concerns related. It is important to me and I know it is important to every veteran living in the Casa Grande Valley.

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