

SPECIAL COMMENTARY

The Readjustment Counseling Service Native American Working Group completed the paper in May 1992. This paper's objective was improving service delivery via education for counselors who provide readjustment counseling services to Native American veterans and their families in a culturally sensitive fashion. The Native American Working Group began an organized effort since 1984 to educate Department of Veterans Affairs personnel and contract providers about the needs of Native American veterans. The group has learned how to successfully interface with the larger system for the benefit of all veterans and has found support for our goals has steadily grown. The goal was quite simply to improve the quality of services to Native American veterans and their families.

This publication has generated much interest and has been requested by various individuals and agencies. The Department of Veterans Affairs has distributed copies to each VA Medical Center, Outpatient Clinic, Regional Office, and Vet Center across the nation. To our knowledge, this is the only resource paper on Native American veterans written by Native American veterans.

The paper has generated much interest throughout Native American communities. Readjustment Counseling Service has offered the expertise of the Native American Working Group to many interested agencies. The Native American Working Group members provide consultation with other providers on the treatment of Native American veterans who are effected by the trauma of war. As a group and individually, our outreach efforts are ongoing and proving to be productive. The members have been organizing sweats for veterans, attending pow-wows with veterans, organizing support groups within Native American communities, encouraging and supporting conferences (e.g., Camp Chaparral at the Yakima Reservation), and promoting traditional healing practices for veterans.

Readjustment Counseling Service is doing outreach throughout Indian country with many tribes; for example Harold Barse, Oklahoma City Vet Center counselor, is doing outreach with the Cherokees in North-eastern Oklahoma, and Dr. Don Johnson, Seattle Vet Center team leader, is outreaching the Yakima in Washington State. In fiscal year 1993, the Vet Centers in the Mountain Region (which is one of seven regions nationally), provided services to approximately 540 new Native American Veterans who had never been seen before, totalling over 4,100 client visits. Nationally, Vet Centers saw approximately 1400 new Native American clients with over 9,300 client visits. One promising example of an effective project is that of the Hopi outstation being administered by the Prescott Vet Center. Through the innovative work of the Regional Office in Denver

and Prescott Vet Center, two counselors were hired to provide services on the Hopi Reservation. Cliff Balenquah, former Hopi Tribal Council vice chair and governor, and Vietnam veteran and counselor, has been successfully running a Vet Center outstation on the Hopi Reservation for 2 years and providing services to Hopi, Navajo, and Apache veterans. Mr. Balenquah was later joined by Hopi counselor Norma Nahsonhoya (Air Force veteran) and work study Lloyd Talas (Operation Desert Storm and Somalia veteran) in providing services. This model Vet Center promotes the theme of community based care via Hopi helping Hopi (and other tribes) on Hopi, and Native American veterans helping Native American veterans. Dr. Al Batres, regional manager out of Denver, is planning to extend this type of model on other Reservations in the near future.

Though the advancement in services seems slow, it is more progress than we had originally anticipated. What we have discovered and hope others will understand is that the principles learned in treating Native American veterans are applicable to other veteran groups. Our mission is to keep the promise via providing the best quality clinical care to veterans with military related readjustment problems, which includes Native American veterans on and off the Reservations who have served our nation in time of need.

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