

PARTNERING WITH VETERANS TO CHOOSE EFFECTIVE PTSD TREATMENTS

VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) for PTSD: Key Recommendations for Mental Health Providers

There are several effective treatments for PTSD. This quick guide offers tips to implement key recommendations of the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) in your work with Veterans.

HOW CAN YOU HELP? SCREEN FOR PTSD

PTSD commonly occurs with other mental health problems. Conduct periodic screening of PTSD using the Primary Care PTSD Screen for *DSM-5* ([PC-PTSD-5](#)). This 5-item screening measure is designed to identify individuals with probable PTSD.

PTSD ASSESSMENT

To diagnose PTSD, the CPG suggests using validated, structured clinician-administered interviews, such as the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale for *DSM-5* ([CAPS-5](#)). See our [CAPS-5 Training Curriculum](#) to gain a comprehensive understanding of the assessment and its administration. Free continuing education credits are available.

PSYCHOTHERAPY RECOMMENDATIONS

The CPG gives the highest recommendation to 3 specific trauma-focused psychotherapies, delivered 1-on-1. Here are descriptions you can share with Veterans:

- **Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT):** CPT teaches you how to change upsetting thoughts and feelings. It involves talking with your therapist about your negative thoughts and doing short worksheets.
- **Prolonged Exposure (PE):** PE teaches you how to slowly approach memories, feelings, and situations that you have been avoiding since your trauma. It involves talking about your trauma with a therapist and doing some of the things you have avoided since the trauma.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** EMDR helps you process your trauma. It involves calling the trauma to mind while paying attention to a back-and-forth movement or sound (like a finger waving side to side, a light, or a tone).



There are 3 medications recommended for PTSD: paroxetine, sertraline and venlafaxine. **The CPG recommends CPT, PE and EMDR over these medication options.**

OTHER SUGGESTED PSYCHOTHERAPIES

If CPT, EMDR or PE are not available, there are other psychotherapies suggested for PTSD treatment, with less research support. Here are descriptions you can share:

- **Written Exposure Therapy (WET):** WET helps you find new ways to think about your trauma and its meaning through writing assignments you complete during 5 sessions.
- **Present-Centered Therapy (PCT):** PCT focuses on how PTSD symptoms are affecting you. You will work with your provider to find solutions to current problems, stressors, and relationship issues.



CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS

The CPG recommends that the presence of co-occurring conditions (e.g., substance use disorder, depression, chronic pain, sleep disturbances, etc.) should not prevent a Veteran from participating in an evidence-based treatment for PTSD.

PATIENT-CENTERED CARE AND SHARED DECISION-MAKING

The recommended approach to care is a collaboration where you and the Veteran consider clinical evidence, risks and benefits of treatment options, as well as the Veteran's need and preferences. Ideally, decisions align with the Veteran's personal health and well-being goals. As such, it is important that you present information adeptly, and that communication is empathetic and non-judgmental.

PTSD TREATMENT DECISION AID

The online **PTSD Treatment Decision Aid** is a tool to help Veterans clarify their treatment goals. The Decision Aid includes videos of providers describing treatments and an interactive chart that can be filled out with preferences and printed to support decision-making conversations with you.

LEARN MORE

Health care providers working with Veterans in any setting can contact the PTSD Consultation Program for free, personalized support on any question related to assessment and treatment of trauma and PTSD. Our team of experts can respond via email, phone or video. Reach out to PTSDconsult@va.gov or 866-948-7880.



We also offer **webinars** and **courses** on the CPG with free continuing education credits.

Get the full CPG and other resources on the **National Center for PTSD website**.