

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MILITARY MEDICINE, 00,0/0:1, 2020

To the Editor:

Mental Health Care for Military Personnel in the COVID-19 Epidemic

As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, confirmed COVID-19 cases among military personnel have been reported globally including nearly 1,576 soldiers in Russia, over 4,000 in the United States, 1,500 soldiers in France, and 54 soldiers among Indian border security force. COVID-19 poses a threat to both physical and psychological health. While there has been some reporting about broad mental health challenges from COVID-19, there has been little attention paid to the unique structural aspects of military mental health and the disruptive role the COVID-19 plays within this cohort.

Military personnel have been a major task force in combating COVID-19. Given that military personnel are already at risk for mental health problems (eg, depression, anxiety, PTSD) during non-pandemic times, the increased workload and stress come with COVID-19 may increase the likelihood of psychological distress. One study investigated psychological health among 642 people who worked in a military hospital and found increased detection rates for anxiety (29.44%) and depression (36.45%) during the COVID-19 epidemic. Risk factors for anxiety and depression were concerns over being infected with COVID-19 themselves or their families. Thus, early intervention is needed to address the psychological distress caused by COVID-19. Mental health service has been restructured to be delivered via the internet or hotlines during the outbreak of the COVID-19. However, online mode requires high quality of the internet and some individuals may still prefer to have in-person interviews. One group of counselors and technicians in Shandong, China came up with a comprehensive psychological stress rescue model that adopts a combination of online and offline approaches with one counselor and one

technician working in the frontline by conducting face-to-face individual interviews and the rest of the team working remotely. The team monitored physical and psychological data among medical staff and rescuers working in hospitals in Wuhan (the epidemic center) through wearable monitors and provided individualized intervention as needed. The monitor system is design to sound alarm once the health data below pre-selected safety threshold. This model features flexibility, efficiency, and safety (the COVID-19 being contagious) when compared to traditional face-to-face counseling or online counseling that totally relies on the internet.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has put a strain on the mental health of service members across the globe. As one of the major task forces responding to the epidemic, military personnel need adequate support to maintain their mental health during this stressful period. It is important that those who serve can also receive the services they need during these difficult times.

Xin Guo^{*,†,#}, Lili Wu^{*,‡,#}, Xiaoqian Yu^{§,#}, Zhuoer Sun^{*,#}, Weizhi Liu^{*,‡}

*Lab for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Faculty of Psychology and Mental Health, Naval Medical University, Shanghai 200433, China

†The Battalion 5 of Cadet Brigade, School of Basic Medicine, Naval Medical University, Shanghai 200433, China

‡The Emotion & Cognition Lab, Faculty of Psychology and Mental Health, Naval Medical University, Shanghai 200433, China

§Department of Psychology, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33661, USA

#These authors contributed equally to this work.

doi: 10.1093/milmed/usaa127

© The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States. 2020
All rights reserved. For permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oup.com.