

A combat trauma nurse focuses on her own recovery

Linda: My name is Linda. I served in 2 different military branches. I served in the Army for 6 years and then the Air Force for 15 years. I served as a nurse during wartime, a combat trauma nurse in Balad. I worked nightshift, and so every night we would be getting the most severe injuries. I watched people lose their arms or legs, their heads or life. It was almost like I told myself I didn't have a right to start having problems.

Whatever you do in the military, when you're in that war zone you are focused on your mission, whatever that is. And you don't allow yourself to take in what you are seeing. But the sleeping problems turned into nightmares and a little bit of isolation. I actually avoided thinking about it by becoming a workaholic. And on the outside, I looked great. I became Field Grade Nurse of the Year. I did a lot of things; I hid a lot of my emotions.

Whether you're active duty or you're a veteran, the stigma of seeking help is one of the main reasons most people don't get help. I was, I guess, lucky in the fact that I was placed with an individual that was trained in trauma therapy and would actually meet me right after my nightshift. We met and did something called prolonged exposure, which was really tough. But it worked.

For me, prolonged exposure is looking at a few of those traumatic experiences. You kind of go back in time in a way, and you reprocess that memory. You take it very slowly and you record it. My homework at night was to listen to that recording several times a day. It basically was a foundation of me getting better. I was able to remember things more, be more out in public. I was more aware of what triggered me and how to manage those triggers.

It's not just one thing that works. There's a combination and it's different for each individual. I have a service dog that helped me tremendously. She allowed me to go to school to get my master's degree. She went to school with me every day. I got my psychiatric nurse practitioner. And now, actually, I work at the VA.

I've had several patients tell me, you know, I didn't lose my leg. I didn't lose my arm. I feel like it's almost I shouldn't go there. The reality is there is all kinds of care there, both mental health, physical help. But also, when they come, even if they don't want to continue at the VA, I give them resources in the community.

Sometimes coming and talking to either a transition assistant or coming to mental health they can give that information out to the veterans.

PTSD is treatable. You don't have to have it the rest of your life. We all in the military a lot of times think we are the only one. We don't know that there's this big wave of veterans that have been exposed to trauma that can get help. They can get better with good therapy, and it's different for each individual. Good therapy, support from the family members and they find their mission again.



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