

Psychiatric Nurses and Creative Arts Therapists Collaborate to Maximize Mental Healthcare Resources & Clinical Outcomes for Military Service Members

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BACKGROUND

There is a behavioral health provider shortage in military and veteran healthcare systems while lifetime rates of military-related PTSD and TBI continue to rise¹.

This poster demonstrates an innovative clinical strategy of integrating creative arts therapies into interdisciplinary treatment aimed at coordinating patient care and narrowing professional practice gaps.

METHODS

Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network supports creative arts therapists (CATs) working in military healthcare to provide art therapy, music therapy, and dance/movement therapy treatment.

Discipline-specific creative arts therapies interventions help patients process trauma^{2,3}, reduce hyperarousal, increase self-awareness, manage depression^{4,5,6}, and improve motor, speech, and cognitive functioning⁷.

Research recommends interdisciplinary collaboration between CATs and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (PMHNPs) to increase treatment accessibility, improve physiological and psychological symptoms, and optimize patient outcomes^{8,9}.



RESULTS

As of 2025, 32 CATs worked with patients and families as part of interdisciplinary teams at 12 Creative Forces clinical sites.

CATs facilitated stand-alone sessions, engaged in co-treatment, and consulted with other providers in support of patient-centered care.

Integrating creative arts therapies into rehabilitation models expanded patient access to innovative care while simultaneously alleviating the clinical burden on PMHNPs.

Reciprocally, PMHNPs assisted CATs in translating clinical arts-based products (paintings, song lyrics) into shared language for the interdisciplinary team-at-large to inform treatment planning¹⁰, enhance patient conceptualization, and deepen the understanding of patients' responses to various treatment approaches.

In addition, Creative arts therapists led staff wellbeing interventions to help nursing staff cope with workplace stress, prevent burnout, and promote resilience. Maintaining the wellbeing of military healthcare staff is essential to ensure sustainability of high-quality treatment for service members, veterans, and their families¹¹.

Since 2017, 25,063 patients have received care in 141,214 therapy encounters led by Creative Forces CATs¹².

CONCLUSION

Increasing healthcare demands to meet the behavioral health and rehabilitative needs of military-connected populations in the U.S. require implementation of innovative interdisciplinary care models.

Creative art therapies can bridge treatment gaps by fostering collaborative synergy between CATs and PMHNPs that improves patient conceptualization, optimizes recovery outcomes, and increases treatment accessibility in large healthcare systems.

CATs can mitigate staff stress, demonstrating that interdisciplinary partnerships are essential for patient and provider well-being.

REFERENCES



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