



## The Birmingham News

### PTSD catches up with veterans, but treatment, awareness are improving

Thursday, October 22, 2009

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The numbers of those being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder at the Birmingham VA Medical Center have increased steadily in recent years, but most of those being treated are not the new veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Jose Vazquez, a social worker who has been working with PTSD patients at the medical center for nearly 20 years, says many Iraq and Afghanistan vets who need help are years away from walking in the door. Most of those who walk in - sometimes with canes, sometimes in wheelchairs - did not see action in Fallujah, Baghdad or along the Tigris, but in Da Nang, Tay Ninh or along the Mekong. Vietnam vets make up most of those who attend 12 group therapy sessions that Vazquez holds for PTSD patients.

It took a while - years, in fact - before many of them started seeking help. When Vazquez gives the reasons why, he also is saying why the number of PTSD patients from the nation's current two wars is a trickle, not yet a torrent.

"When they first leave the service, they're still young and strong, and they are in the denial phase and they just want to pick up where they left off before they went to war," Vazquez said. "What they don't realize is that war changes your whole life, and it changes the life of your family, also."

To cope with life in a peacetime environment so different from a war zone, many vets plunge into their work, devoting more time to the job than to their family life, Vazquez said. But after about 10 years, the denial starts taking a physical PTSD3E --

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