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PTSD Can be Managed!

Tom Porpiglia, MS, LMHC, for Salem-News.com

PTSD is not new. Evidence of PTSD has been around for centuries, going back to the time of the Greek Poet Homer's Iliad and PTSD does not heal with time if not properly treated.

(ROCHESTER, N.Y.) - The American military provides the finest training and has the most sophisticated weapons in the world, and the men and women who serve in our armed forces know that personal sacrifice is inherent in the job of service to country.

Sometimes the sacrifice is exposure to trauma that affects emotional and/or physical health. Sometimes the sacrifice is life itself. Spouses and families of military personnel also make huge sacrifices and suffer "collateral damage" when their loved one is suffering from the effects of war trauma, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

It takes uncommon courage to face an enemy in combat. It also takes uncommon courage to look your own pain in the eye and not deny it, repress it, run from it, or attempt to anesthetize it. If you're a veteran who is drinking, smoking, overeating or using drugs etc. it's because you're home from the war, but part of your psyche is still stuck there.

Addictions are anesthesia for pain, and if you have PTSD, you have painful unhealed trauma on your internal "hard drive," your brain. You're not alone. There are thousands of men and women like you.

The macho military culture slaps a "weakness" stigma on PTSD out of ignorance of basic brain physiology. The scientific fact is that PTSD is a trauma-induced brain malfunction that no amount of training, dedication, denial, repression, or willpower can override. One cannot think their way out of PTSD. It is not a psychiatric disorder. It is a conditioned body response causing brain chemistry to go awry, keeping us stuck in a stress response, and we can correct the problem. The military doesn't stigmatize a person if they get wounded or need surgery, and PTSD is no different.

Thanks to the thousands of Vietnam vets suffering from the devastating consequences of combat trauma, PTSD is now a diagnosable condition in 1980. Formerly, the military referred to combat trauma as shell shock or battle fatigue. However, PTSD is not limited to combat veterans. Crime victims, people who witnessed an event such as the World Trade Center attacks, and even abused children can have it too.

What Is Trauma?

PTSD is not new. Evidence of PTSD has been around for centuries, going back to the time of the Greek Poet Homer's Iliad and PTSD does not heal with time if not properly treated. In fact, PTSD can sit dormant for years, like a tick on your back waiting for the proper combination of events to trigger symptoms. Additionally, people living with someone who has PTSD and health care workers who are constantly exposed to the trauma in some way can develop PTSD.

To understand PTSD, one must first have a working understanding and definition of trauma. Trauma is any event or series of repetitive events that threatens our sense of safety and core values about what is right. The event is intensely stressful and there is a real or perceived threat of loss of life, often accompanied by shock.

Traumatic events can be man-made or natural. Witnessing an event can be just as traumatizing as being a victim



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we think about a past traumatic event it may cause us to feel fear, anger, grief, rejection, guilt, sadness, regret, shame, heartache, etc. The experience is as real as if it happened yesterday. Survivors do not realize they have survived a there is a loss of sense of purpose Severe trauma can cause a psychic numbness. In some cases, we may remember clearly what happened; we just can't feel any emotion about it. That doesn't mean that the damage has not occurred usually means that the emotional charge connected to the event was detoured and pushed down (repressed) into the body/mind to prevent us from being overwhelmed by the experience at the time it occurred.

Sometimes we have no conscious memory of the event at all. The event is often fragmented and compartmentalized. Technically this is called dissociation. Dissociation happens when an event is too painful or frightening for the psyche to deal with, so our consciousness "checks out" in order to psychologically survive the trauma.

Background Data

In 1994, I wrote a paper on PTSD in veterans (<http://tinyurl.com/ofk98>) as a final project for my Bachelor's degree, the outlook at that time was grim. Until recently, the best therapists could do was teach people to manage their symptoms, and put them on medications as needed. With traditional talk-therapies, we helped them grieve their loss and learn to cope with the shame, guilt, and overall pain of their experience. In other words, we gave them coping skills for their pain instead of healing.

In 1987, a new technology called Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) was in the early stages of development. An internationally respected PTSD expert, psychologist Charles Figley, director of the Institute of Traumatology at Florida State University, did a formal research project on EMDR in 1993. Additionally, Figley also researched Thought Field Therapy (TFT – the grandfather of EFT), Traumatic Incident Reduction (TIR) and Visual Kinesthetic Dissociation (VKD) at the same time. Figley and an associate conducted the research because Figley did not understand that the conventional therapies were not suitable for treating PTSD. That research proved both EMDR and TFT as effective treatments for PTSD both achieving over 50% reduction in symptoms. Although the DOD has officially approved EMDR for PTSD treatment (<http://www.news.navy.mil/search/display.asp?>), many VA centers do not allow its use.

In the interim, psychiatrist and PTSD expert Bessel van der Kolk, presently the Medical Director at the Trauma Center in Massachusetts, (www.traumacenter.org) began groundbreaking research on PTSD. Dr. van der Kolk is trained in both EMDR and TFT/EFT and now endorses the use of Energy Psychology methods like EFT to alleviate the symptoms of PTSD in a very gentle, quick, safe and easy manner.

In 1994, Gary Craig, the developer of EFT (www.emofree.com), proved the effectiveness of EFT on combat PTSD by treating some Vietnam Veterans (they volunteered for treatment) for free over a period of six days at a California VA clinic. The videotaped sessions showed these men completely healing from flashbacks, nightmares, fears of public places and terrifying combat memories that had held them captive and disabled their lives for over 20 years.

Unfortunately, the VA staff ignored these obvious healings and remained committed to their routine and ineffective talk-therapy and drug methods.

Susan Hannibal of Guided Healing (www.guidedhealing.com) has also demonstrated and documented on DVD, the effectiveness of EFT on PTSD, as have many other practitioners, only to have the VA shun them. I too have, delivered materials to the local VA centers only to be told "thanks but no thanks. In my private practice, I have witnessed EFT effectiveness with PTSD on a Gulf War Vet, several sexual abuse cases, and my own PTSD issues connected with Vietnam.

The Veterans Administration

Some VA centers have been resistant to embracing new techniques because they insist that any new method must have valid, controlled, scientific research first, tested, and proven safe and effective. That's an understandable and reasonable approach for a drug, however, when men and women are committing suicide and families are disintegrating over PTSD we need to do something immediately. The purpose of a scientific research study is to A) prove the proposed therapy is effective and B) that it is harmless.

"The first stage of evidence in establishing a new therapy is the accumulation of case studies and anecdotal reports. Here the data are striking, with reports coming in from hundreds of therapists who represent the full spectrum of backgrounds and theoretical orientations."

David Feinstein, *The Promise of Energy Psychology*

Energy psychology methods like EFT have been around for over 10 years and are in use by millions of people worldwide.

All one has to do is search the database on the EFT web site to see the data David Feinstein refers to above. Other than perhaps a temporary headache or stomach upset, not one case of any type of harm has ever been reported. Many

centers are still using group therapy/talk therapy and those of us who have experienced PTSD or treat PTSD know ineffective talk-therapy is for PTSD. Leading trauma researchers such as Drs. van der Kolk and Figley do not support talk-therapy or exposure therapy for PTSD because it retraumatizes the client and does little to change the chemical imprint in the brain. Some VA centers are so resistant to cutting-edge energy psychology techniques that managing is threatening VA counselors trained in EFT with the loss of their jobs for using EFT. That's an abuse of power. In addition, since most of these organizations are male dominated, and these particular instances involve female employees, it also constitutes an abuse of women. People abuse and control from a place of fear. One has to wonder what the VA is afraid of.

I have heard many veterans comment that the VA wants to keep our veterans "sick." Others have told me they were allowed to speak about their pain and experiences. Other horror stories about the VA exist and I don't need to go into them here. In short, my opinion is that the VA lacks compassion and empathy towards our veterans. These men and women have put their lives on the line for our country, and in ignoring stunningly effective, safe and non-traumatizing therapies like EFT, they are not offering our vets the best service available.

By withholding this effective PTSD treatment, the VA is costing us, the taxpayers a lot of money for years to come. In my opinion, not allowing veterans a choice to try EFT constitutes abuse of the veteran. Energy Psychology and EFT is a simple, effective treatment for PTSD, which can quickly and easily normalize veteran's lives in most cases. I think it is time veterans and their families started demanding cutting-edge treatments that are non-traumatizing and more effective. We could be saving millions, perhaps billions of dollars annually by treating PTSD with the latest technology AND giving vets their lives back at the same time. It's hard to argue with success, and yet the VA ignores the obvious.

Elsewhere in the World

Mental Health workers in Kosovo are using EFT to treat victims of war atrocities. More recently, survivors of Hurricane Katrina are being treated with EFT (see <http://www.energytraumatreatment.com>). There is an international organization, Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology (ACEP, <http://www.energypsychy.org>) that has a world-wide membership of psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, certified social workers, mental health counselors and others who are using these techniques daily.

A Call to Action

I think it's time to wake the sleeping giant. It's time for the VA to get out of the dark ages and into the present. If you are a veteran who has been traumatized by war or other event connected with your military service and are in the VA system, start demanding better treatment. Demand that you have an option to choose Energy Psychology and/or EFT for your PTSD treatment. If they won't listen to you or provide for you, go elsewhere and find someone who specializes in EFT for trauma and PTSD. There is a huge list of EFT practitioners at www.emofree.com. Some of them specialize in trauma and combat PTSD. You may have to pay out of pocket for the services, so before you decide what to do, ask yourself this question; "What is my life, my healing and my family/marriage worth?" Just because the VA provides services to you doesn't mean they are the best services or that you have to use them. I never went to the VA because I didn't trust them and still don't trust them, and after the things I've seen and heard, never will. I paid for my own treatment and recovery because I found the best in EFT and Energy Psychology. EFT saved my life, and it can save yours.

Neuroscience is just beginning to understand how EFT works to heal the effects of PTSD on the brain. However, the evidence and success stories are overwhelming. To see the results other vets have had with EFT for yourself, visit the Emotional Freedom Technique web site, (www.emofree.com) or Sue Hannibal's web site, (www.guidedhealing.com).

A newly published book, *The Promise of Energy Psychology* (<http://www.EnergyPsychEd.com>) by Feinstein, Eden, and Craig, explains the theory and practice of EFT. Included in the book are some brain scan photos over the course of treatment that demonstrates the changes in brain activity. One can see the same information in a paper titled **Overview of Research in Energy Psychology**.

If you have been the victim of physical or emotional abuse, rape, surgery, accidents, hurricanes, tornadoes, war, and more, and have not been the same since the experience, you are probably experiencing PTSD along with depression and anxiety. They are often found together. This is not a helpless, hopeless situation. Energy Psychology offers significant relief when other methods have failed. Skilled EFT practitioners abound around the world and they can help you heal yourself.

Tom Porpiglia, MS, EFT-ADV., LMHC and founder of Life Script Counseling Services is a Vietnam Veteran and a licensed mental health counselor in private practice in Rochester, NY. He specializes in the use of Emotional Freedom Technique and other Energy Psychology methods to resolve trauma. He offers a reduced rate for veterans. He can be reached at 585-704-0376, or tom@lifescrptcounseling.com; www.lifescrptcounseling.com

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AuntiePatricia July 10, 2011 4:36 pm *(Pacific time)*

"All healing is essentially the release from fear." PTSD is fear. "Healing is always certain." Thank God for that.

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