



# The Unique Challenges of Chaplain Ministry in the End-of-Life Care for Veterans



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# VA Core Values and Characteristics



No organization can succeed without values to match its mission.

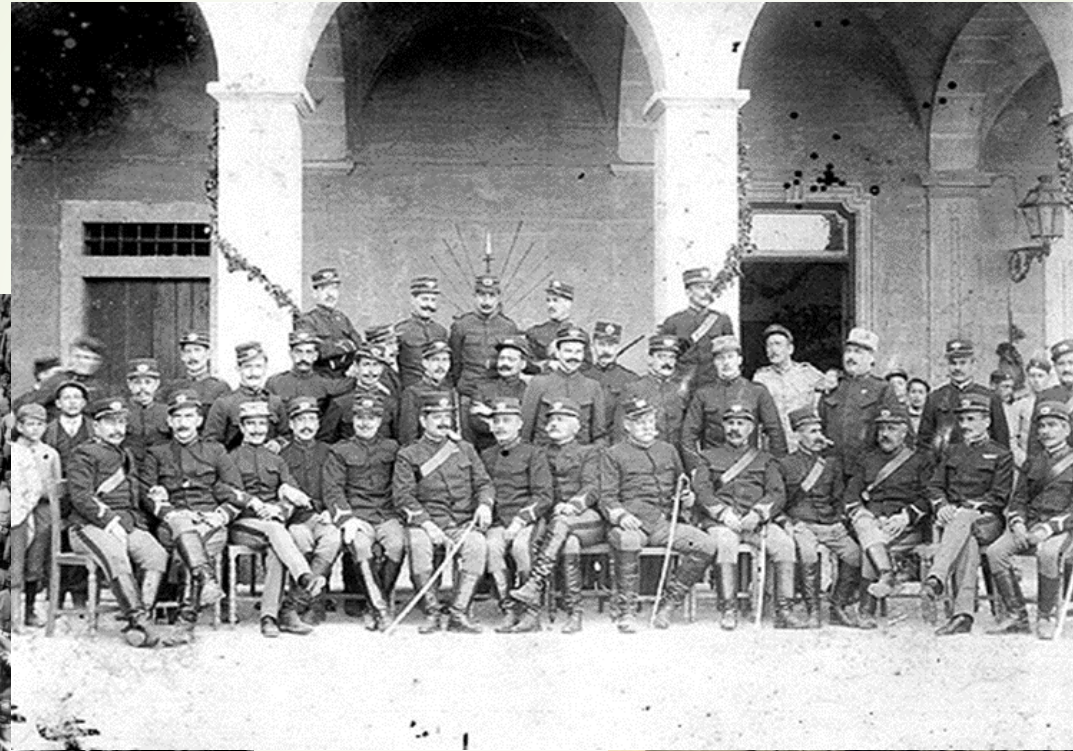
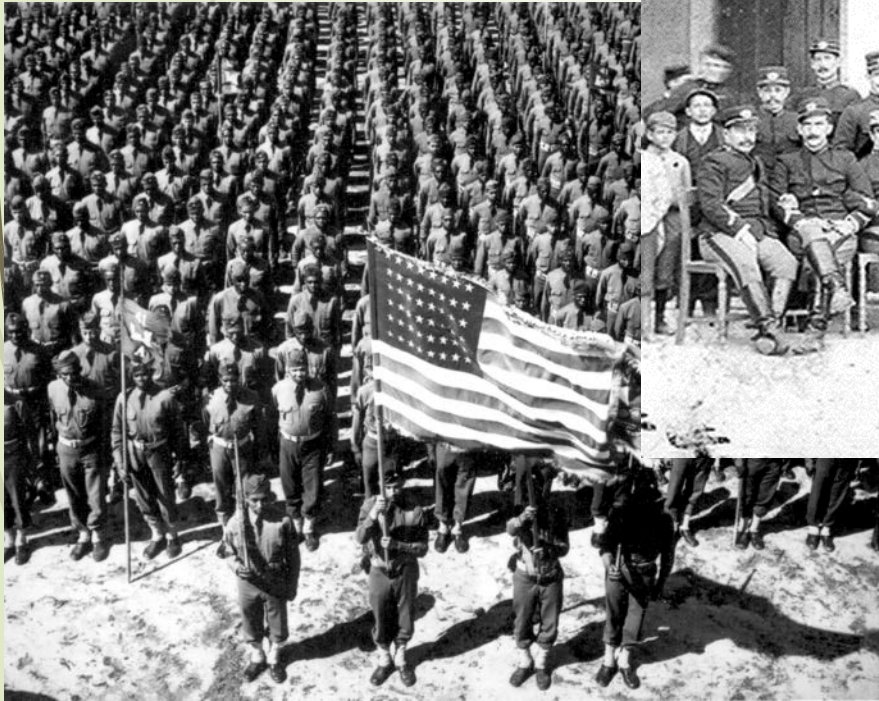
Our mission, as the Department of Veterans Affairs, is to care for those “who shall have borne the battle” and for their families and survivors.

Our core values focus our minds on our mission of caring and thereby guide our actions toward service to others.

# Department of VETERANS AFFAIRS

"THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF ASSISTANCE FOR VETERANS" \*

\*VFW – Veterans of Foreign Wars, *Veterans Affairs Benefits*, (2019)





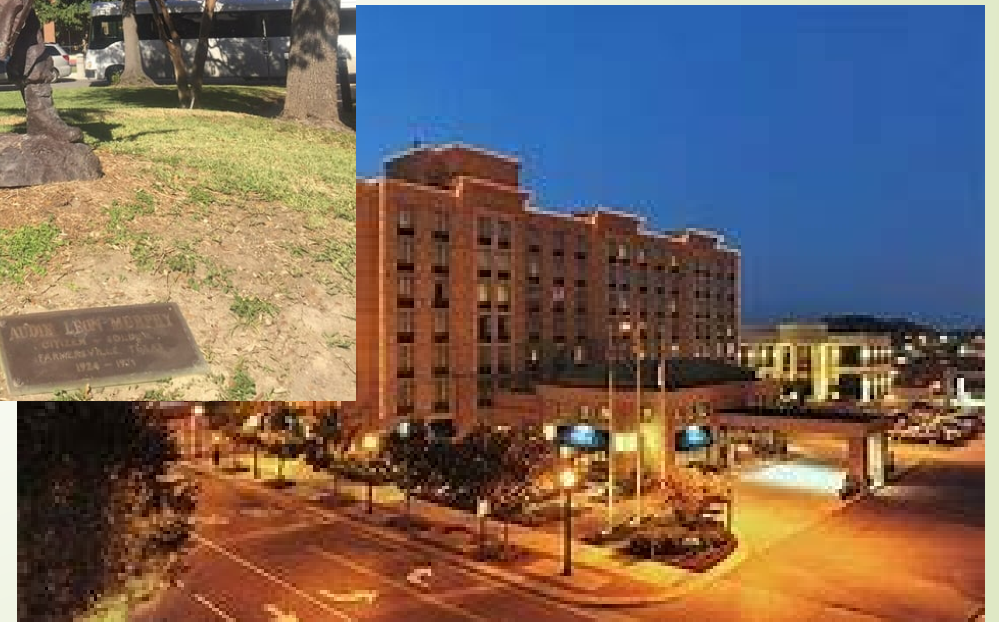




# VA – Largest Integrated Healthcare System in the USA

## VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)

1,200 VA Healthcare Facilities  
= 172 Medical Centers;  
1,000+ Outpatient Sites



# VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA)

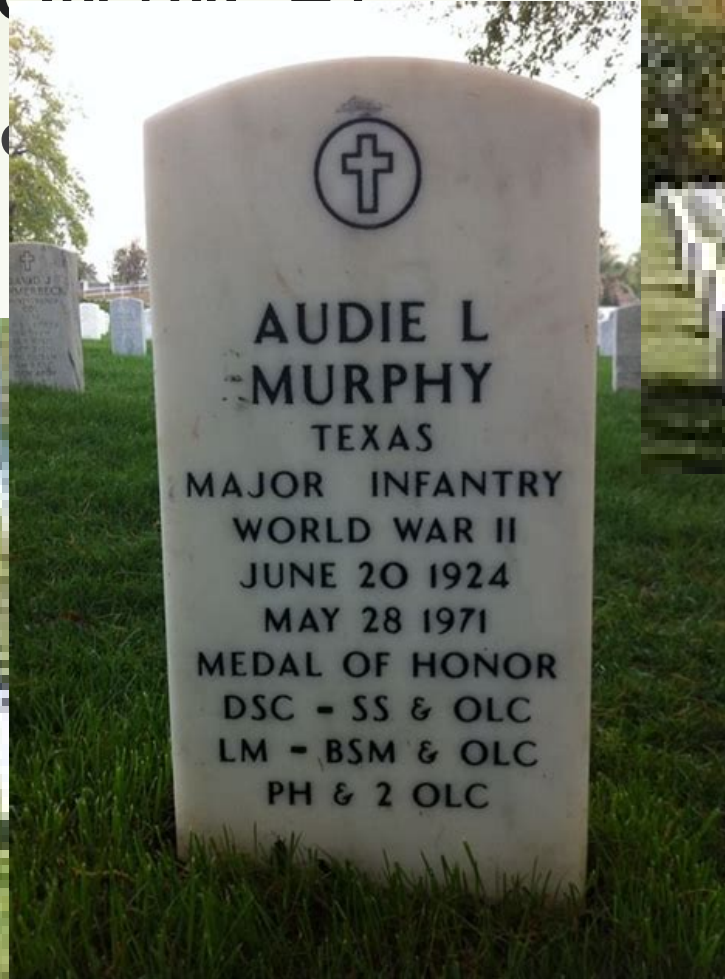
Compensation, Pension, Fiduciary  
Services, Employment Services, Disability  
Compensation, Educational Assistance,  
Home Mortgage Loans, Vocational  
Rehabilitation, Life Insurance





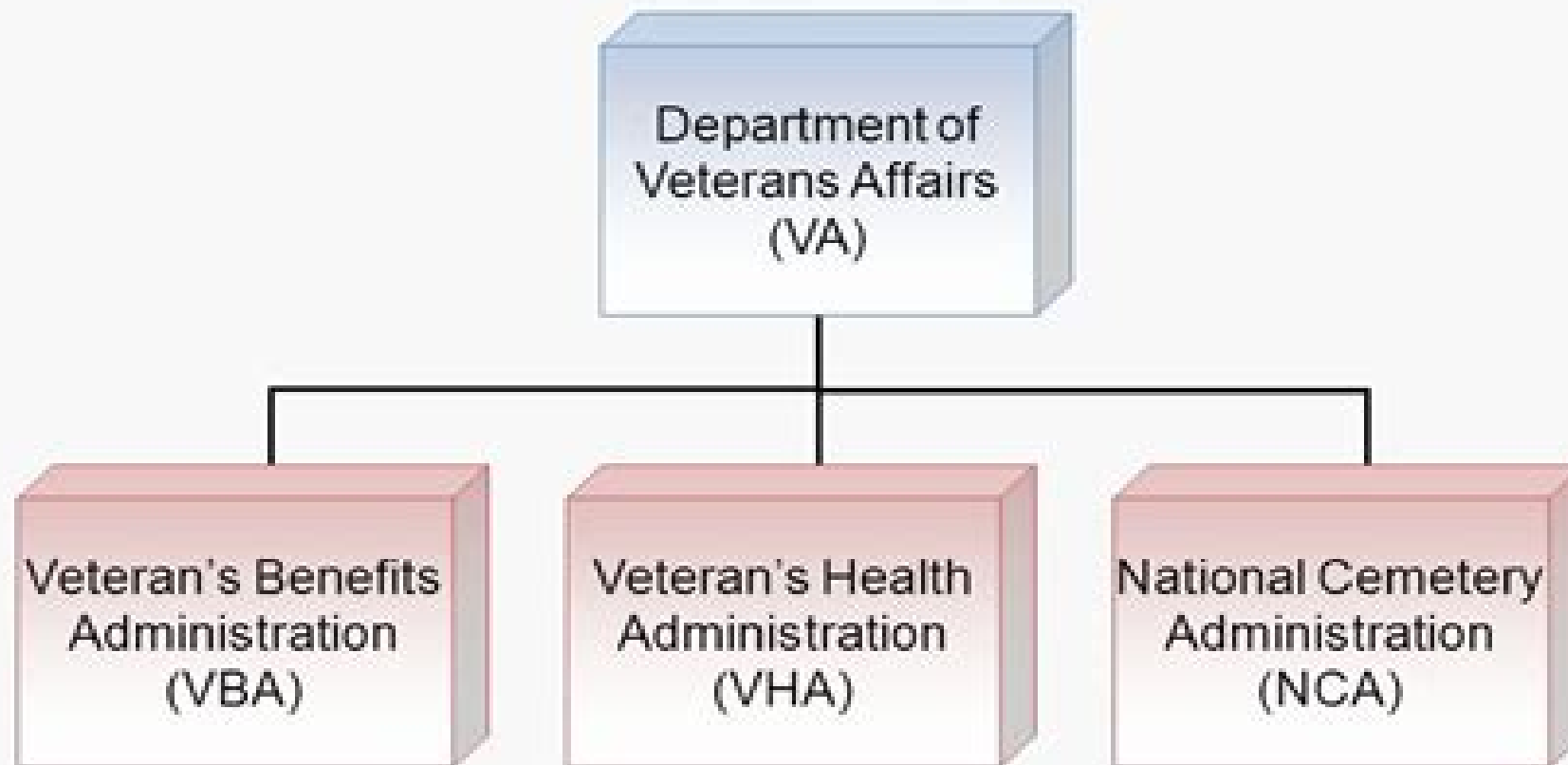
# NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION (NCA)

130+ National Cemeteries  
21,000+ acres of land





# VA Organization

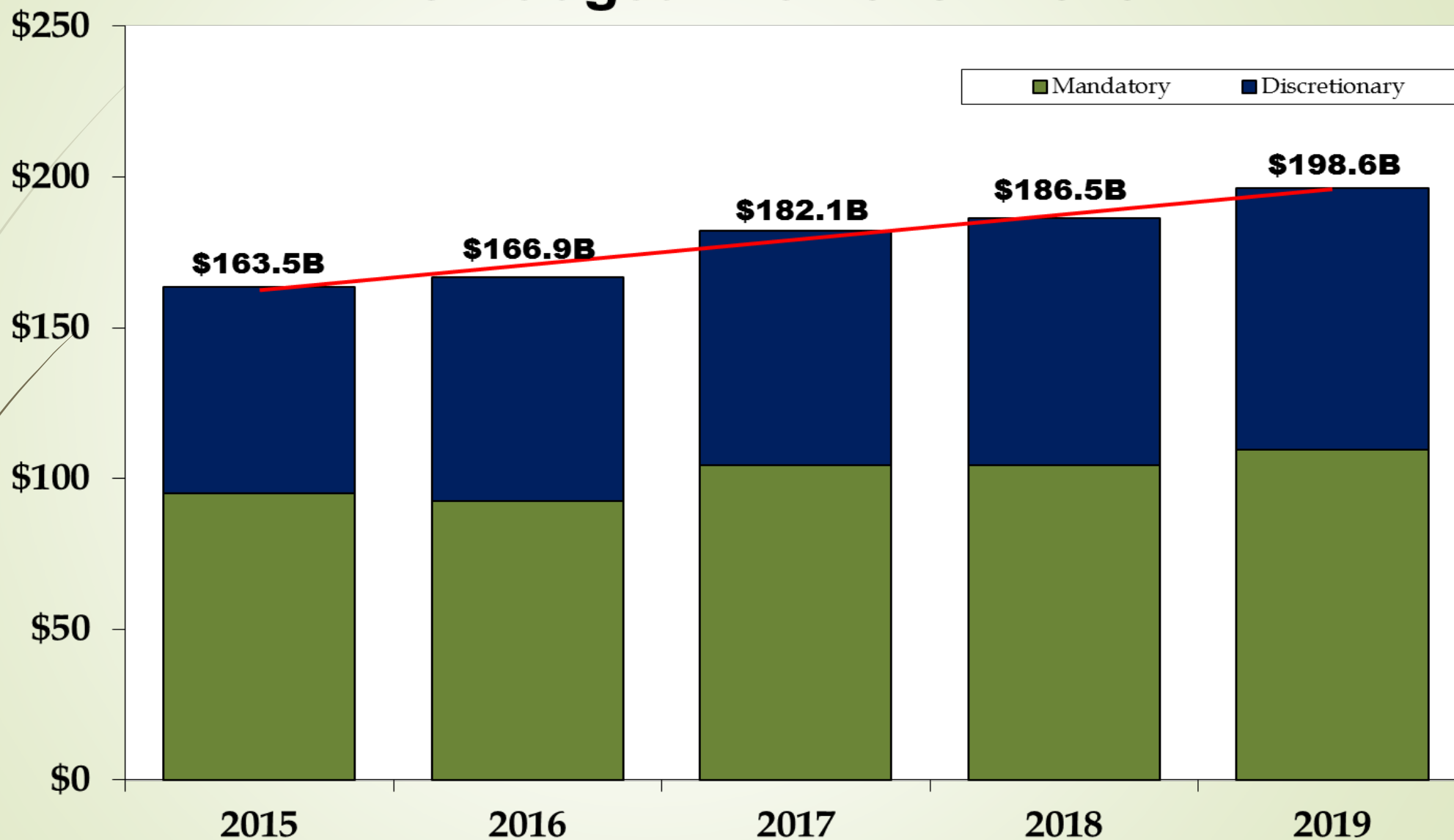


Courtesy of Kevin Meldrum



\$ in billions

# VA's Budget FYs 2015 - 2019



# VA Benefits and Health Care Utilization

<b>Number of Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>4.74 M</b>
<b>Number of Veterans Rated 100% Disabled (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>684,851</b>
<b>Number of Veterans Receiving VA Pension (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>260,091</b>
<b>Number of Spouses Receiving DIC (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>405,547</b>
<b>Number of Total Enrollees in VA Health Care System (as of 6/30/2018):</b>	<b>9.15 M <sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Number of Total Unique Patients Treated (FY 18):</b>	<b>6.34 M <sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Number of Veterans Compensated for PTSD (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>1,035,269</b>
<b>Number of Veterans in Receipt of IU Benefits (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>357,255</b>
<b>Number of VA Education Beneficiaries (FY 17):</b>	<b>946,829</b>
<b>Number of Life Insurance Policies Supervised and Administered by VA (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>5.99 M</b>
<b>Face Amount of Insurance Policies Supervised and Administered by VA (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>1.22 T</b>
<b>Number of Veterans Participating in Voc Rehab (Chapter 31) (FY 17):</b>	<b>132,218<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Number of Active VA Home Loan Participants (as of 9/30/18):</b>	<b>3.12M</b>
<b>Number of Health Care Professionals Rotating Through VA (Academic Year (AC) 17):</b>	<b>122,949</b>
<b>Number of OEF/OIF Amputees (as of 10/01/18):</b>	<b>1,720<sup>2</sup></b>

Source: VBA Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity; Health Services Training Report; VBA Education Service; <sup>1</sup> VHA OABI and VSSC (10E2A); <sup>2</sup> DoD. Produced by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics; <sup>3</sup> Includes 1,651 Veterans in interrupted case status over one year.

<http://www.va.gov/vetdata/pocketcard/index.asp>



# ACCESS STANDARDS

- VA is proposing new access standards, effective when the final regulations publish (expected in June 2019), to ensure Veterans have greater choice in receiving care.
- Eligibility criteria and final standards as follows were based on VA's analysis of all of the best practices both in government and in the private sector and tailored to the needs of our Veteran patients:
  - Access standards will be based on **average drive time** and **appointment wait times**.
  - For primary care, mental health, and non-institutional extended care services, VA is proposing a **30-minute average drive time standard**.
  - For specialty care, VA is proposing a **60-minute average drive time standard**.
  - VA is proposing appointment wait-time standards of **20 days for primary care, mental health care, and non-institutional extended care services**, and **28 days for specialty care from the date of request with certain exceptions**.
- Eligible Veterans who cannot access care within those standards would be able to choose between eligible community providers and care at a VA medical facility.

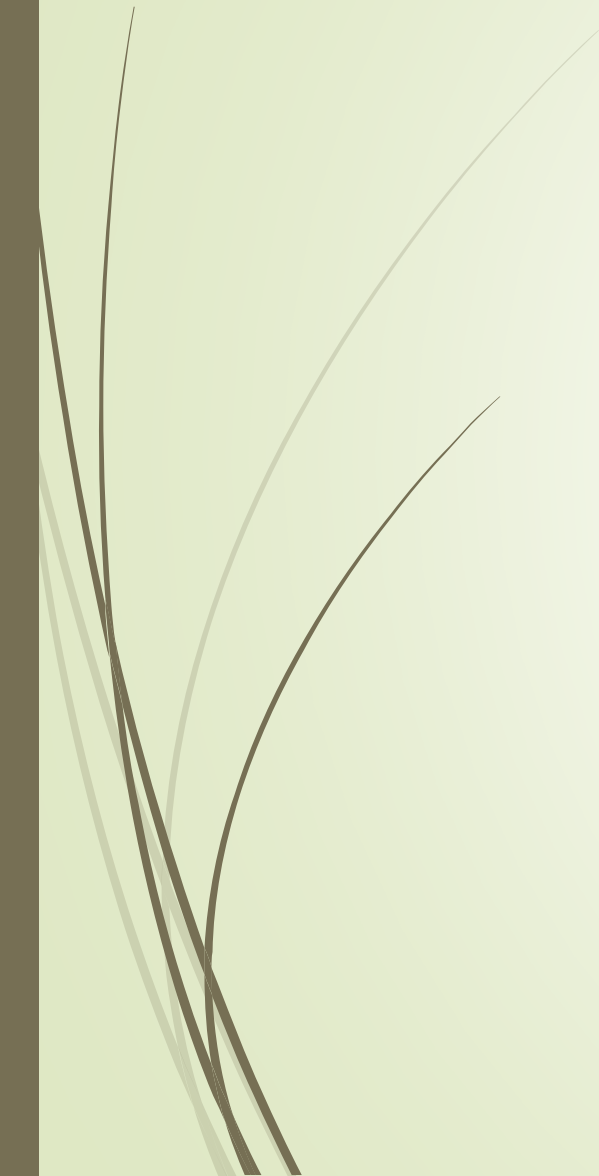
# WOMEN VETERANS

2018: 10% or 1.92 Million

2037: 32% or 2.17 Million (113% increase)







# SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITY

Chronic Diseases After Discharge,  
Tropical Diseases, Prisoners of War,  
EXPOSURES (Agent Orange,  
Radiation, Mustard Gas, Lewisite,  
Camp LeJeune Water  
Contamination), Gulf War Veterans







## VA HOSPICE and END-OF-LIFE CARE

Wholistic care that provides physical, emotional, social and spiritual support for Veterans and their families towards quality of life, comfort and management of symptoms.

# Case 1: A Veteran in PAIN but with HOPE

- JOHN, 72 yr.-old, admitted to CLC in January. Roman Catholic.
- Served in the Army 4 yrs., post-Korea
- Afflicted with advanced ALS, used electric wheel chair
- Communicated with iPad speech enhancement, keyboard, monitor
- Presented with depression, 100% SC
- No history of alcohol or substance abuse
- Divorced 4X, 5 children, 3 in diff. States,
- Eldest son – MPOA; 2<sup>nd</sup> – no relationship; 3<sup>rd</sup> – incarcerated
- Attempted suicide once
- SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT
  - Deepening sense of loss
  - Intense need for emotional support, broken self-image, deep disappointment
- Suffering Level: 9-10 (10 most severe)
- Positive:
  - Strong faith
  - Spiritual resources (sacraments, devotion)
- Adjusted Suffering Level: 4-5
- CARE PLAN
  - Use of spiritual resources
  - Make sense and meaning



# Case 1: A Veteran in PAIN but with HOPE

- Mid-April: Declining Health, PAIN
- Declared HOSPICE
- Updated SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT
  - Anointing, Sacraments, as requested
- More Aggressive Pain Management
- May: transfer to Hospice Unit, more Pain
- Requested greater Pain Control and Management
- Language of LAMENT
- Jeremiah 4:19 – “My heart, my heart – I writhe in PAIN! My heart pounds within me! I cannot be still.”
- Language of the sufferer
- Esther FLEECE: “a passionate expression of our pain that God meets us in. It’s real talk with God about ways we are hurting. It’s an honest prayer to God about where we are, not where we are pretending to be.”
- JOHN: saving factor: knew how to LAMENT
  - Sacraments, Devotions, Confession, Feelings and Open to Inspiration
- Esther FLEECE: “...tapping honestly into our emotions in a deep and primal way that sometimes transcends words. I’m comforted to know that God meets us here, any way we choose to cry out.”



**3 hours**

A child or teen  
is killed by  
a gun



**2 hours  
15 minutes**

A child or teen is  
killed by a gun



**1 hour  
45 minutes**

A person dies from  
a cocaine overdose



**1 hour  
5 minutes**

A veteran  
commits suicide

## More active U.S. soldiers die from suicide than combat

ACTIVE-DUTY SUICIDES IN 2012

**349**

COMBAT DEATHS IN AFGHANISTAN IN 2012

**295**



# WE LOSE **20** VETERANS TO SUICIDE EVERY DAY

Reaching out  
can help save  
a life



Learn the risks  
and warning signs  
of suicide  
—  
[afsp.org/signs](http://afsp.org/signs)

Let them  
know you  
care and have  
an honest  
conversation

If you're  
concerned,  
encourage them  
to get the help  
they need

## DO YOU KNOW A VETERAN WHO IS IN CRISIS?



### VETERANS CRISIS TEXT

Text to  
**838255**

## HAVE YOU LOST A VETERAN TO SUICIDE?

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
FOR SURVIVORS (TAPS)  
[taps.org](http://taps.org)

AFSP LOSS RESOURCES  
[afsp.org/loss](http://afsp.org/loss)

## MORE RESOURCES FOR VETS

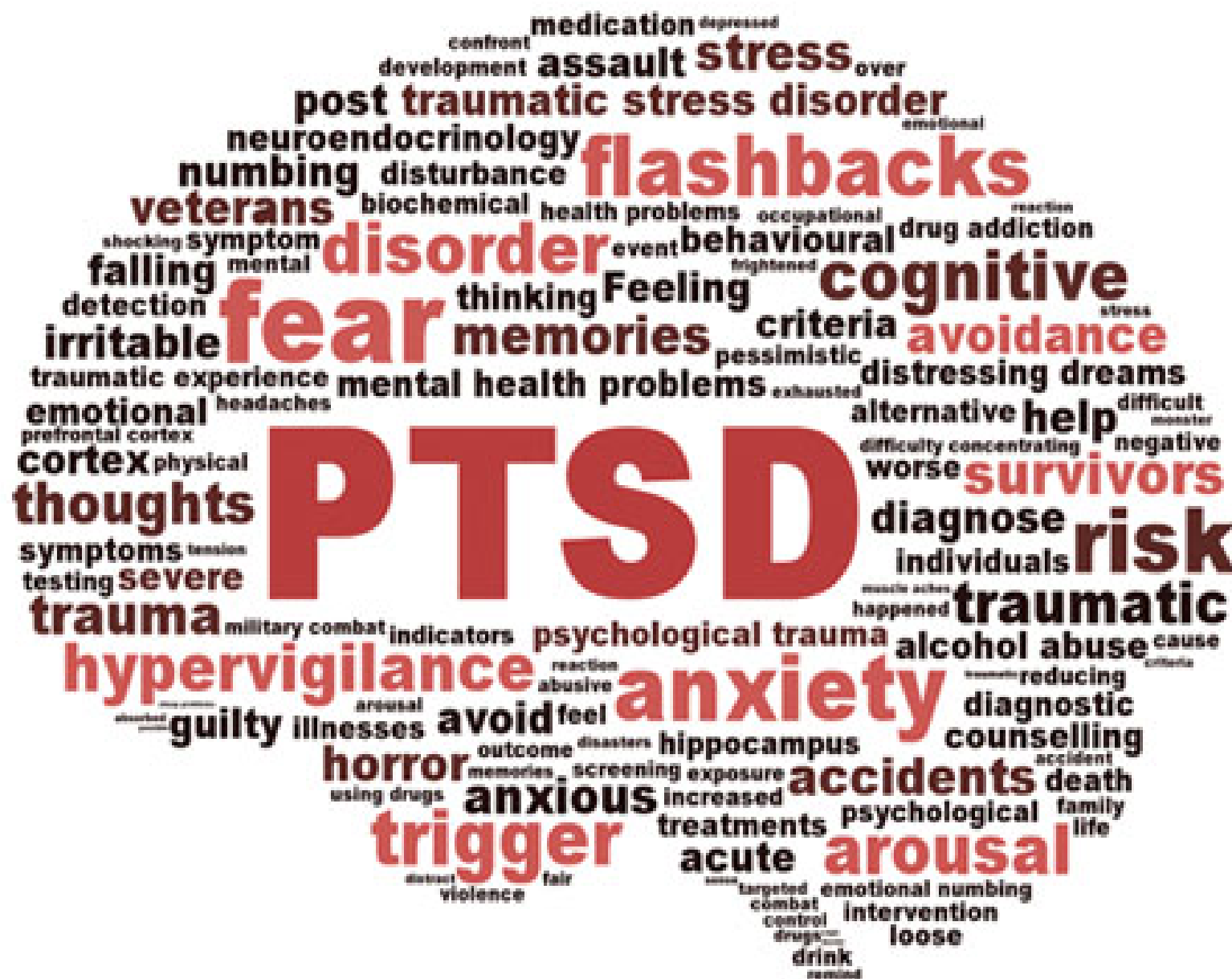
GIVE AN HOUR  
[giveanhour.org](http://giveanhour.org)

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN  
VETERANS OF AMERICA (IAVA)  
[iava.org](http://iava.org)

VETS 4 WARRIORS  
[vets4warriors.com](http://vets4warriors.com)

For AFSP, the silver color represents the loss of a first responder, veteran or active military. Cut along the dotted line and post a sticker with this bracelet to Facebook using #StopSuicide and #VeteransDay

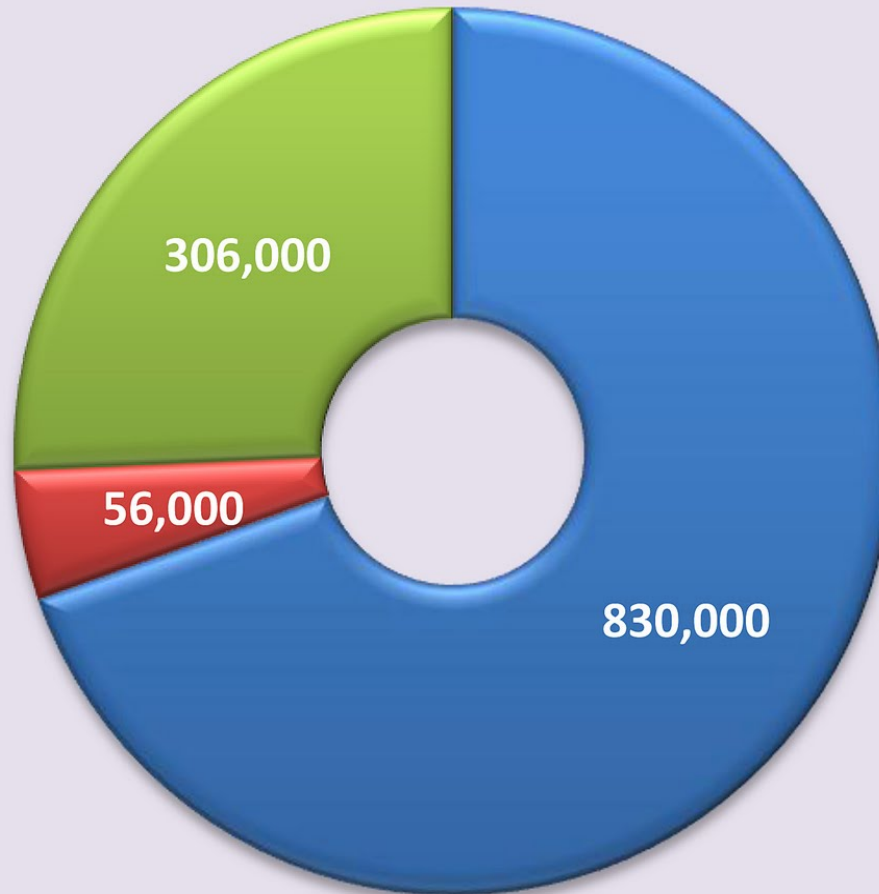






# Veterans with Service-Related PTSD

■ Vietnam (Initial est.) ■ Gulf War ■ Iraq/Afghanistan (est. thru 2009)



source: US Dept of Veterans Affairs

# Moral Injury

*"The violation of what's **right** by a person **in authority** in a **high stakes** situation."*

- Jonathan Shay *"Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the undoing of Character."* New York: Athenaeum Imprint of Macmillan, 1998

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*"Moral Injury is **disruption** in an individual's **confidence** and **expectations** about his or her own moral behavior or others' capacity to behave in a **just and ethical** manner."*

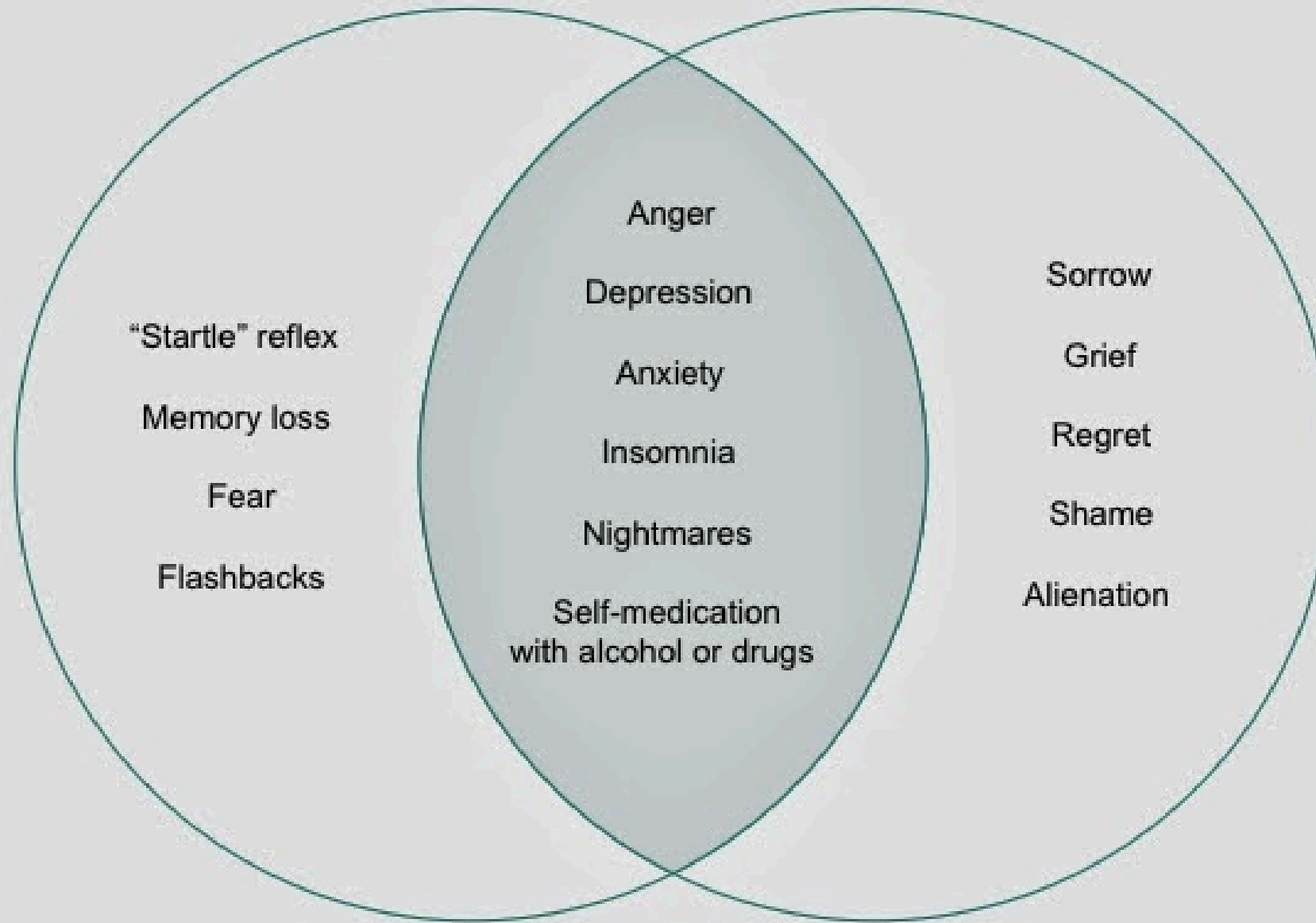
- *"Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy"*
  - B.T. Litz., et.al., (Dec. 2009) clinical Psychology Review, 29, 695-706



**PTSD**

**BOTH**

**MORAL INJURY**



# Case 2: A Woman in Combat

- ▶ JANE joined Marine Corps in early 20's
- ▶ Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003
- ▶ Took pride: Female Staff Sergeant
- ▶ Saw action in COMBAT
  - ▶ All-out offensive in darkness
  - ▶ "Shoot and eliminate all moving things!"
  - ▶ Aftermath: Strewn bodies of unarmed civilians (Elderly, Women, Children)
- ▶ Behaviors of Maladjustment (nightmares, loss of appetite, excessive guilt, decreased energy, distress, intrusive memories)
- ▶ Partial loss of hearing
- ▶ Diagnosed with PTSD and Moral Injury (MI)
  - ▶ Never Married, 3 "Botched" Relationships
  - ▶ No children
  - ▶ No declared religious preference (Baptist background)
- ▶ Diagnosed with Advanced Colon Cancer, metastasized to other organs, age 36 years
  - ▶ "rightfully deserved it!"
- ▶ Teams Palliative Care and Hospice
  - ▶ Smooth transition
  - ▶ Manage PTSD symptoms
  - ▶ Address Emotional/Spiritual Anxieties
  - ▶ Quiet Room, Aromatherapy



## Case 2: A Woman in Combat

- MINISTRY
  - Healing and Forgiveness
  - Language of CONFESSION
- SCRIPTURE Passages of FORGIVENESS and Pleas for MERCY
  - Psalm 51.9
  - Isaiah 55.6-7
  - Matthew 11.28-30
- Remorse, Regret, Self-Forgiveness
- Healing of Guilt, Shame



# Case 3: A Man Violated

- ▶ PEDRO, Hispanic Navy mechanic, 20's
- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> voyage at sea, lasting a few months
- ▶ Sexually assaulted by 6 shipmates "with very bulky bodies"
  - ▶ Raped with penetration/insertion
- ▶ Supervisor assaulted and threatened Pedro with demotion/deployment
- ▶ Result:
  - ▶ Isolated
  - ▶ Shock, Motionless
  - ▶ Jumpy, on edge
  - ▶ Suspicious
  - ▶ Anger, Resentment
- ▶ **MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA**



## Case 3: A Man Violated

- ▶ PEDRO discharged DISHONORABLY (no benefits, etc.)
- ▶ 30 Years Post-Military:
  - ▶ Alcoholism
  - ▶ Trouble with the Law
  - ▶ Drugs, Marijuana
  - ▶ Attempted Suicide 1X
- ▶ Personal Life
  - ▶ Married, Divorced 2X, 2 Kids
  - ▶ Court Decision: Honorable Discharge
  - ▶ 28-day Rehab treatment: MH
  - ▶ 90-day LT Rehab (Employment)
- ▶ Mid-60's: Liver Cancer, Metastasis





## Case 3: A Man

- Ministry of COMPASSION: HOPE
- Sources of H-ope:
  - Meaning, Comfort, & Love
  - Internal Support
- O-rganized Religion, spi
  - Reliance on God,
  - Resolve to Find GOD
  - Church Attendance
- P-ersonal Practices
  - Prayers, Church Visi
  - Support: Family, Friends
- E-ffects of his faith, struggle
  - Meaning in Death and Dying





# CONCLUDING REMARKS

- VA: Size, Budget – Blessing and a Curse
  - Good News: Stanford University Study
- Mental Health (MH) Concerns: SI, PTSD, MI – Numerous treatment and Support programs available
  - Aim1: Reduce, Eliminate maladjustments
  - Aim2: Facilitate Re-insertion into Society, Functional
- MH (SI, PTSD, MI) Concerns in End-of-Life: Perfect Storm
  - Issues of Unforgiveness, Unfinished Business, Betrayal, Divine Punishment
  - Confusion, Despair and Pain

# CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Chaplain Intervention: Studies Prove Immense Contribution in Addressing Spiritual Needs in EOL
- Focus: Strengths, Resilience over Tragedy, Abuse Neglect, Addictions, Distress
- Chaplain TOOLS:
  - Spiritual Screening/ Spiritual History
  - Spiritual Assessment
  - Spiritual Care Plans

*We cannot direct the WIND,  
But we can adjust the SAILS.*



# DAME CICELY SAUNDERS



*"You matter because of WHO you are. You matter to the LAST moment of your LIFE, and we will do all we can not only to help you die PEACEFULLY, but also to LIVE - until you DIE."*