NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

Veterans and Drugs

The ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have placed an enormous strain on active duty military personnel, returning veterans, and their families. As a result of long and multiple deployments, exposure to combat, physical injuries, an increase in traumatic brain injury (TBI), as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), our veterans and their families have earned our respect and deserve our support.

According to a Department of Defense Health Behavior Survey, illegal drug use has declined, but prescription drug abuse and heavy alcohol use have increased.

FACT: Prescription drug abuse doubled among U.S. military personnel from 2002 to 2005 and almost tripled between 2005 and 2008.

In an attempt to respond to the needs of the men and women of our active duty military and returning veterans, “military doctors wrote almost 3.8 million prescriptions for pain relief medication for service members in 2009- four times more than the 866,773 doses handed out in 2001, according to data from the Pentagon health office.” (*USA Today*, March 17, 2010)

The article went on to say, “Our soldiers are coming back (from combat) wounded, sore, injured and in need of rehab.”

As a result, a 2008 survey revealed that military personnel are reporting higher rates of prescription drug abuse than the general population:

- 5% of the civilian populations
- 11% among military personnel;

In fact, the following quote appeared in the *USA Today* article, “An internal Army investigation report released Tuesday revealed that 25% to 35% of about 10,000 soldiers assigned to special units for the wounded, ill or injured are addicted to or dependent on drugs, according to their nurses and case managers.”

From 2005 to 2009, the number of troops diagnosed each year with substance abuse disorders jumped 50% to nearly 40,000, the Pentagon says. And substance abuse hospitalizations increased from 100 troops per month in 2003 to more than 250 per month in 2009.

WOMEN: More women are serving in our military than at any point in our history. The gender shift creates new challenges in identifying and treating returning veterans' substance use disorders. Expanded access to education, counseling, treatment, peer support and recovery support services designed to address the unique needs of military women, including returning from predominantly male environments where they may have been at heightened risk of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, are needed.

FAMILY: Family members of active duty military and returning veterans face a series of unique challenges. When also facing the addiction of a family member they need access to addiction services that provide family-specific education, counseling and peer support.

The Department of Defense is overseeing and demanding increased monitoring of prescription drugs, restricting their use, offering more treatments like yoga, acupuncture, and various mental health therapies. However, there is a shortage of professionals equipped to handle the enormity of drug addiction within the military.

According to a recent New York Times report, **"given the depth of medical problems facing combat veterans, as well as the medical system's heavy reliance on drugs, few experts expect the widespread use of multiple medications to decline significantly anytime soon."**

Hope For Recovery: Fortunately, as a result of the help and support of the military, veterans and those who work in the field of alcoholism and addiction, more veterans of the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan and their families are living lives in long-term recovery than at any point in our history.

For more information, please visit: Get Help and Family and Friends.