

RCGP veteran accreditation – late Summer 2024 newsletter

The **RCGP veteran-friendly accreditation programme** now has **3,646** accredited RCGP veteran-friendly practices which is **58%** of all 6286 NHS GP Practices in England. In addition, 1,248 / 1,283 PCNs (97.27%) have at least one practice accredited as veteran friendly.

Did you see the [accreditation scheme featured on the BBC's Breakfast](#) programme earlier in the year?

Share your experience as a veteran-friendly practice

We would love to hear about your experience of being a veteran-friendly practice and any interesting case studies you might have that we can share with other practices in the veteran friendly community. [Share](#) your experience with us.

NHS England and the Armed Forces Community

The **Armed Forces Covenant** is the promise from the nation that those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved. These principles are enshrined in law. NHS in England has an impressive number of initiatives to support the military community. All details are correct at the time of publishing the newsletter.

Op COMMUNITY is an NHS England funded pilot being delivered by seven Integrated Care Boards (ICB) providing an easily accessible point of contact with a dedicated email and phone number to support the Armed Forces community, with a specific focus on serving families.

- [NHS Humber and North Yorkshire](#)
- [NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex](#)
- [NHS North Central London](#)
- [NHS Dorset](#)
- [NHS Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire](#)
- [NHS Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland](#)
- [OpCOMMUNITY - Armed Forces Network](#) (NHS Sussex and Kent and Medway)

Op COURAGE is an NHS mental health specialist service designed to help serving personnel due to leave the military, Reservists, Armed Forces veterans and their families. This service is supported by trained professionals who are from, or have experience of working with, the Armed Forces community. [Patients can refer themselves, through a friend, charity or by a GP.](#)

Op FORTITUDE can be [accessed by homeless veterans including those sleeping on the streets](#). The housing hotline, delivered by The Riverside Group, will give homeless veterans a single point of contact to get them the help they need. Veterans can access the scheme through a dedicated charity helpline (0800 9520774).

Op NOVA provides emotional and practical support to veterans at all points of the justice system in England, including pre-arrest, arrest, post-arrest and those serving a custodial sentence. The prime objective is to provide a single support pathway for veterans to move away from the justice system. Veterans are supported on an individual basis, empowering them to engage and access specialist support services. Op NOVA receives referrals from the Police, the NHS Liaison and Diversion teams, the Prison and Probation service and NHS Reconnect (for veterans before they leave prison). Op NOVA is open 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday and 8am - 2pm Saturday, their freephone contact number is 0800 9177299.

Op PROSPER is an Office for Veterans' Affairs programme empowering veterans and their families the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, enabling them to thrive in society by ensuring equal access to employment opportunities and supporting them into sustainable, valuable careers. The programme mobilises the business community to drive practical, cultural and behavioural change within sectors, ensuring they become more 'veteran friendly', while also creating tailored pathways for veterans into positions of employment. Call the Veteran Support Team for further information on 0121 262 3058.

Op RESTORE is an NHS service that supports individuals who have served in, or are leaving the UK Armed Forces, and have continuing physical health injuries and related medical problems attributed to their time in the Armed Forces. Referrals need to come from the veteran's GP by emailing imperial.oprestore@nhs.net.

Op STERLING is a working in partnership with Fighting With Pride, and Age UK delivering a programme to help older LGBT+ veterans, service personnel and their families. The Operation Sterling programme provides telephone-based support, advice and casework to older LGBT+ veterans through Age UK's Advice Line. The existing expertise of Age UK's Advice Line advisors and the knowledge that Fighting With Pride has about how best to support the well-being of LGBT+ veterans means that Operation Sterling can support older LGBT+ veterans in many ways. Access to support is via an [online enquiry form](#).



Introduction to women veterans' experiences and needs

As part of an ongoing funded project, the **Combat Stress Centre for Applied Military Health Research** has launched a [free, 15-minute programme of education and training](#) that focuses on the needs and experiences of women veterans. The materials were developed in response to research by combat stress and others, which highlighted a need for wider awareness of the unique experiences and health needs of women veterans in the UK. The materials aim to develop professionals' understanding of this important but often underacknowledged population, allowing health care providers to become even more veteran aware.

Reaching professionals from the RCGP is of particular importance to this project, as research indicates women veterans often seek help from non-veteran focused services. GP's may be the first point of contact for some women veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma and other gender specific adversities during service.



New resources for GPs and their teams who support military families

A charity [dedicated to supporting children](#) from British Armed Forces families has launched a [new, free webpage for GPs where they can access military-specific tools and resources to support their forces families](#) and learn more about the experiences of service children.

Little Troopers is a UK-wide charity that has been operating since 2011. The charity recognises the unique challenges that forces children face, such as having a parent deployed or having to move home frequently – all of which can significantly impact on a child’s wellbeing and continuity of care.

GPs can also listen to the charity’s ‘expert view’ audio clips where they will hear from military teenagers discussing some of the challenges they have experienced, whilst an Educational Psychologist provides insights into how professionals can support in these situations. In addition, GPs working with children who are struggling with military life and need additional intervention can refer patients to the Little Troopers dedicated Therapy Programme.

“GPs working in busy military communities might choose to create a Little Troopers display board or waiting area or put together Little Troopers packs to give out to families. Whereas even GPs with just one or two service children on their patient list will still find some useful tools that will make your military children feel heard.”



Chronic pain and the veteran

Chronic pain is defined as a pain that lasts more than three months and is more common in military veterans than the general population. Musculo-skeletal, joint, and back pain are the most common causes of pain.

Pain often is associated with mental health problems. Pain is a risk factor for opioid and alcohol misuse. Persistent pain often impacts on relationships, work, hobbies, interests, and other activities, as well as mood and overall wellbeing. Those who experience pain find themselves feeling helpless and lacking the confidence to continue with previously meaningful activities. Unrelieved and persistent chronic pain can contribute to depression, anxiety, poor sleep patterns, decreased quality of life and is a risk factor for suicide.

Pain is best treated with a combination of medication and non-drug treatments along with general guidelines for healthy living (good nutrition, moderate exercise and stretching, mental stimulation and a healthy work-life balance.) [The Veterans' Pain Management Programme \(PMP\)](#) is based at King Edward VII Hospital, London. This free, veteran wellbeing initiative will help the veteran in need of pain management support,

The PMP is a group-based online program delivered by clinicians including a psychologist, nurse, and physiotherapist. The program is funded by charitable donations.

Comments from veterans who have attended the PMP:

'I would recommend this to anyone who has long term pain. I never thought that I could find a non-invasive option to help me with my pain and its management until now.'

'The programme has been hugely beneficial in helping me to understand my long-term pain and identify potential triggers as well as providing positive coping mechanisms.'

Help please

Please spread the word to raise the profile of this important accreditation initiative to neighbouring practices and through Primary Care Networks (PCNs), Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), and Local Medical Committee (LMC) networks.

Should you require any further information or resources, please contact us at: veterans@rcgp.org.uk.

Brigadier (Retd) RG Simpson FRCGP and ER Brookes MRCGP
RCGP Veterans Champions
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