

Telemental Health in the Military and Department of Veterans Affairs

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Presenter Affiliation

- The views and opinions expressed in this presentation are solely those of the authors and do not reflect an endorsement by the U.S. Government, DoD, Department of the Army, VA, or the Kentucky Army National Guard.

Overview

- Introduction to scope and need for TMH within VA/DoD
- Benefits/Advantages of VA/DoD TMH
- Lessons learned
- Future Directions

Scope of contemporary Challenges

- Over 3 million U.S. Service Members have deployed since 9/11
- At least 10-20% of returning veterans meet criteria for mental health diagnosis: PTSD, depression, anxiety, adjustment (Hoge et al., 2004, Litz & Schlenger, 2009)
- Large populations of veterans exist from previous conflicts (Vietnam, Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo...)
- Kentucky has large veteran population: 8%

Suicide



- Between 2004 and 2008, Army suicides increased 80% over the previous rate
 - Historically 20% below national average
- Since June of 2012, suicides have outpaced combat deaths

Army Active Duty:	20.2 per 100,000
Army Reserve:	24 per 100,000
Army National Guard:	31 per 100,000

(Lineberry & O'Connor, 2012)

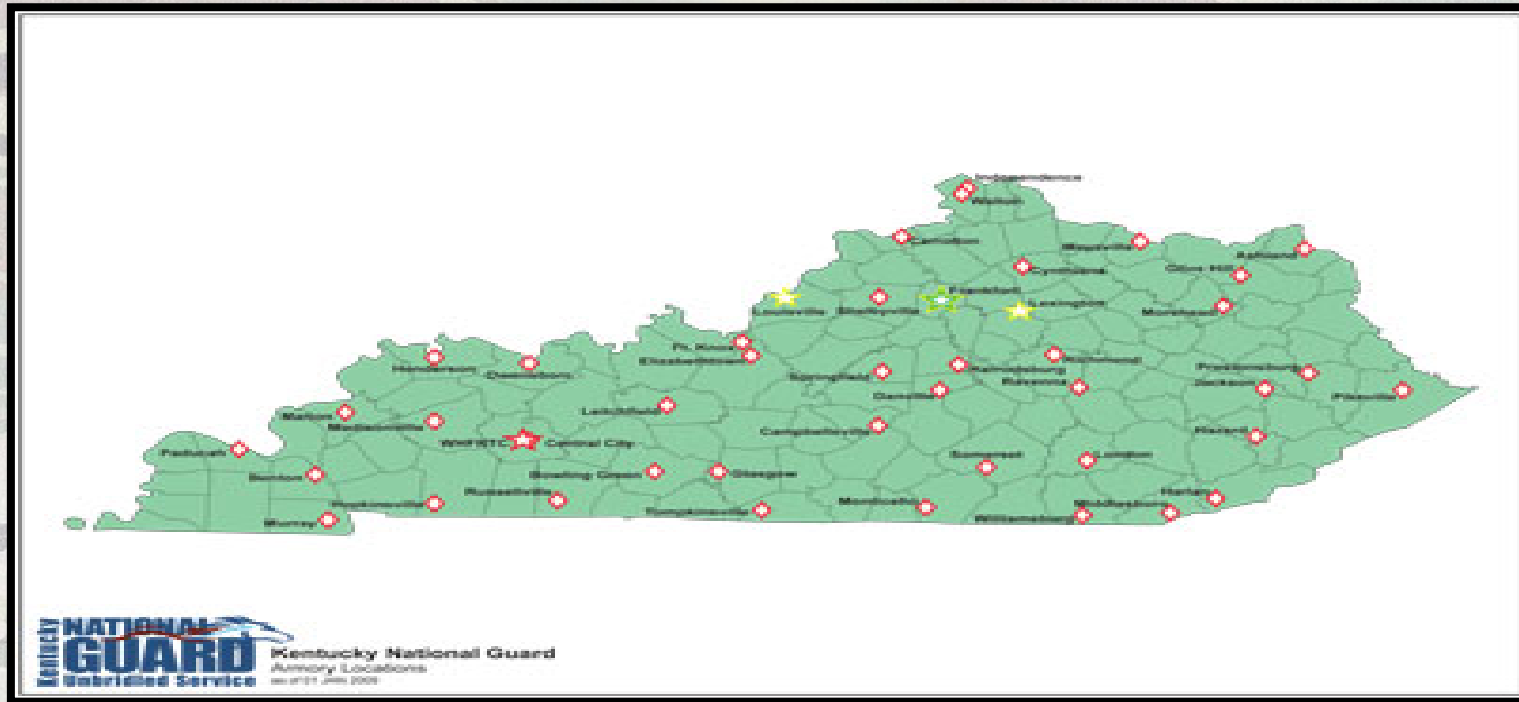
Stigma

- Strength-focused culture
 - No Weakness
- Fear of career impacts
- Perception from peers



Access to Services

- Service Members and their families are geographically dispersed throughout the state and nation.
- Often under resourced/insured if not near military treatment facility



Use of Telehealth in the DoD/VA

“Bringing the right care, by the right person, at the right time, and in the right format.”

~BG Ron Place

- Broad definition of **Telehealth**: Includes prevention, education, telemedicine, and various non-clinical efforts
- Initial pilot of Warrior Resilience Program:
 - 2010: 1,000 TBH encounters
 - 2016: 40,000 TBH encounters
- VA TMH: Over 1.8 million encounters since 2003
- KY National Guard: Approximately 30% of all encounters via TMH

Mental Health Services Provided:

- Delivery of psychological assessments
- Medication management
- Individual psychotherapy
- Group psychotherapy
- Psychological/neuropsych testing
- Integration of digital applications and remote biofeedback to augment treatment
- Consultation
- Supervision

Large infrastructure of VTC sites

- In-person aid/support
- Scanning and emailing of documents/digital questionnaires/metrics
- Increasing shift to home-based TBH mobile applications



Advantages in DoD/VA

- Insurance billing is less of a priority in Federal systems
- Military Mission= Healthy, Ready Force
- Broad team of credentialed providers (fewer state licensure concerns)
- Top-down directive structure
- Existing infrastructure of secure internet/VTC capabilities

- **DoD Benefits and Drivers of Telehealth:**

- Reduced travel-time for patients and providers
- Reduced cost (travel reimbursement/logistics)

- **Increased Access and Engagement from Treatment-Resistant Population:**

- Busy schedules and frequent travel make consistent in-person care difficult
- Reduced Stigma surrounding care (not seen at BH Clinic around other Soldiers, not likely see provider at local PX/grocery)
- Perceived emotional distance may actually be beneficial in some cases

Access for Unique Missions

- Deployments: Providers can increase access to care in austere environments/combat zones
- Provides access to broad pool of providers with understanding of military culture and regulations

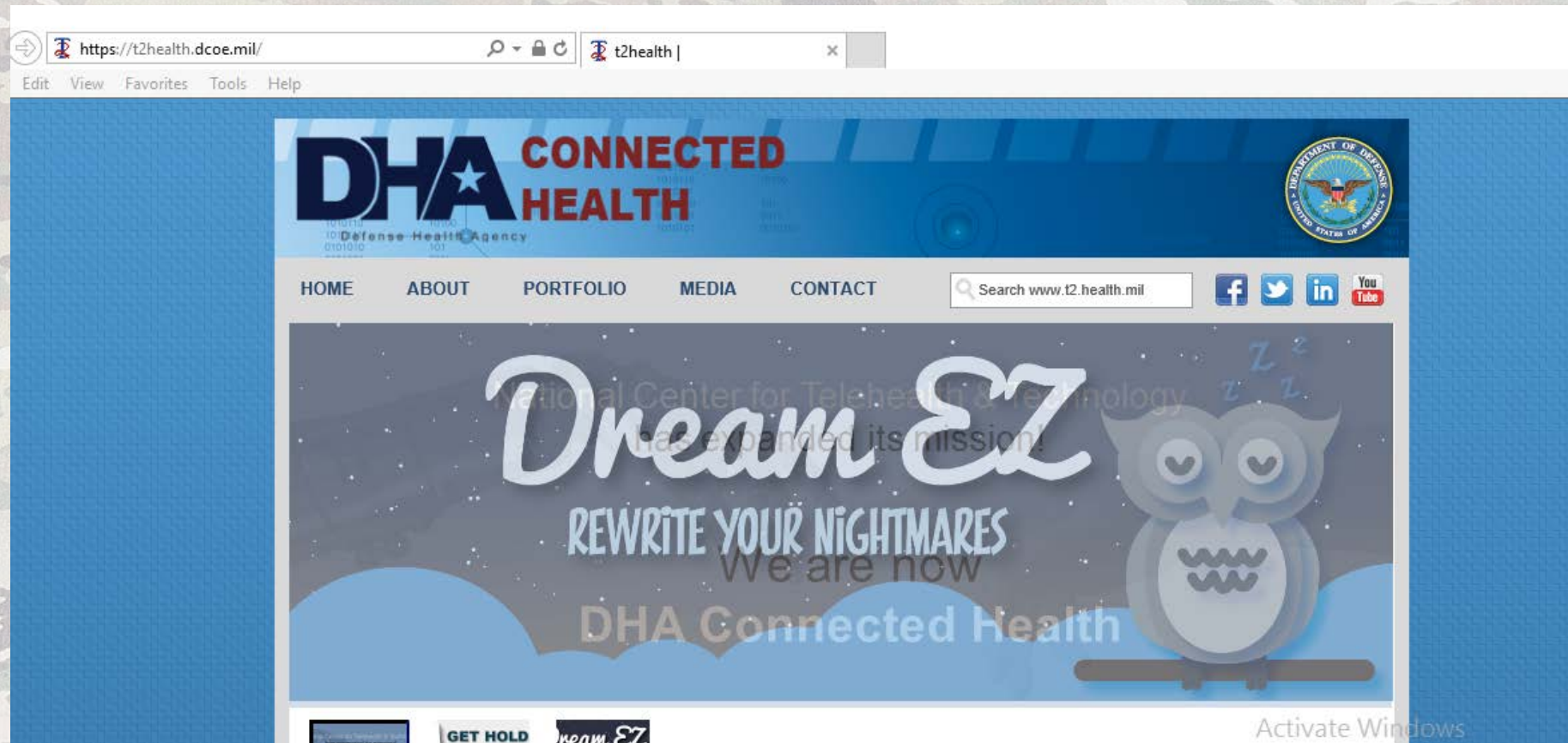


Treatment Efficacy

- Early clinical studies show results of telehealth to be equally effective to in-person psychotherapy
 - Increased utilization in rural areas (Neufeld & Case, 2013)
 - Effective treatment of PTSD (Luxton et al., 2015)
 - RCTs of depression protocol (Folen et al., 2010)

Telehealth Resources

- T2: Center for Telehealth and Technology



T2 Applications

mHEALTH TOOLS

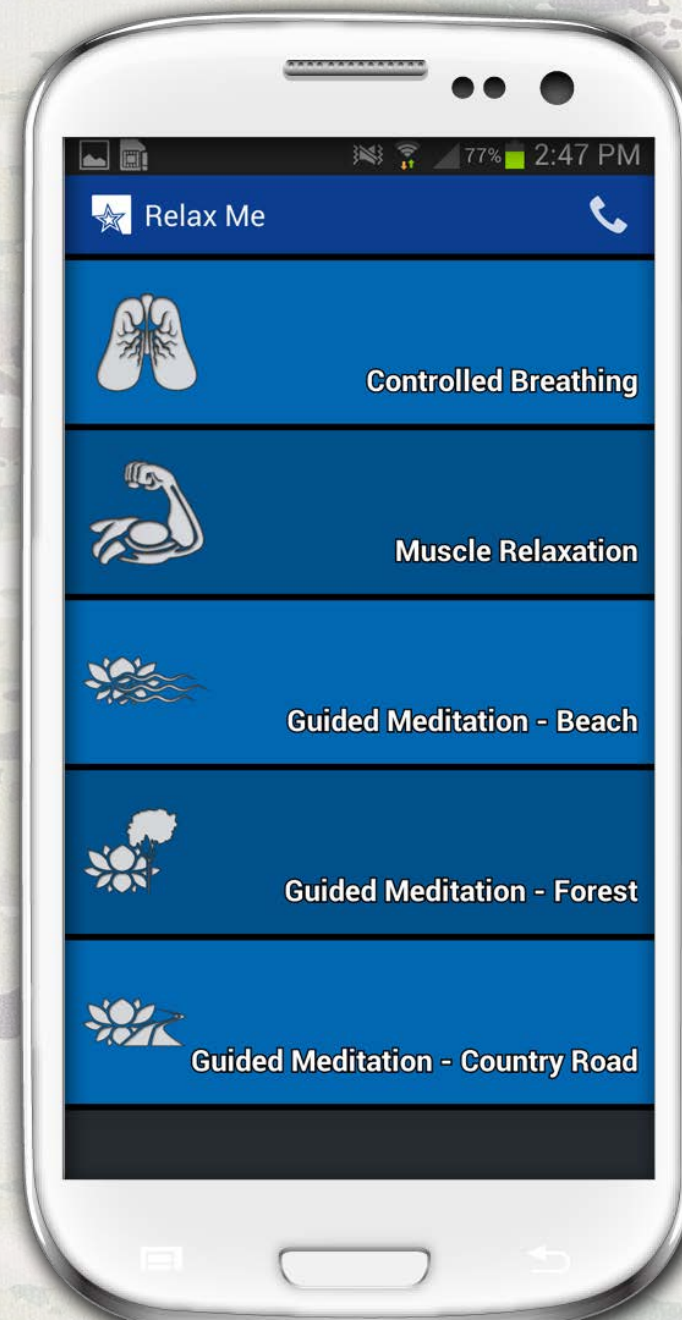
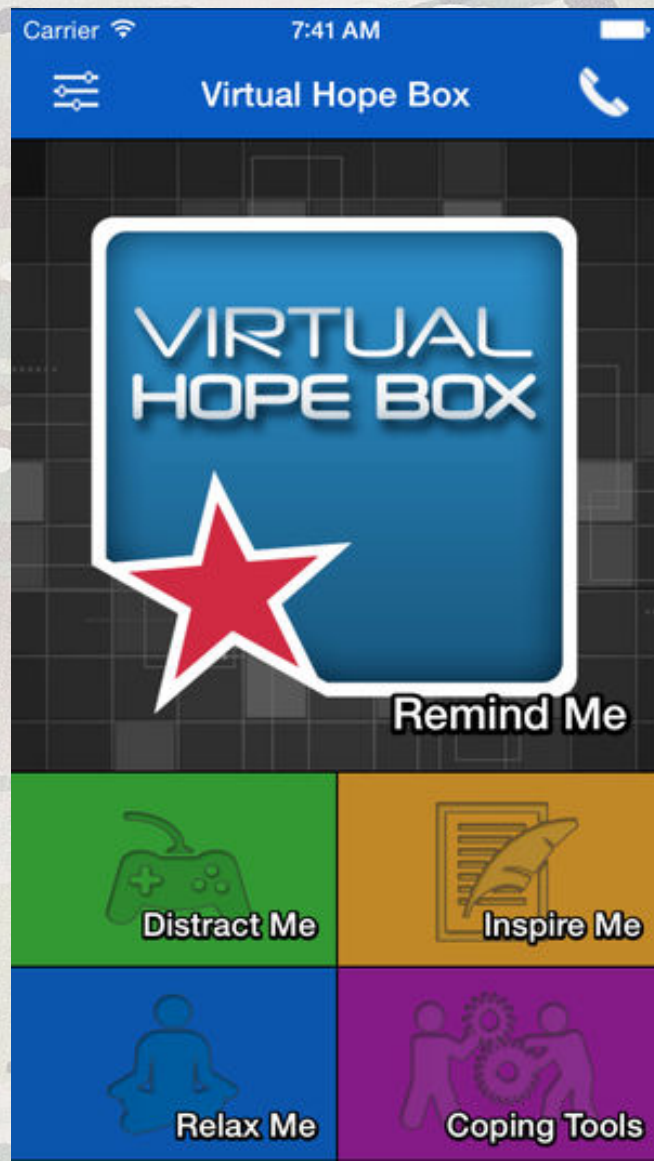
MOBILE APPS

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/>  BREATHE2RELAX
Manage stress by learning and practicing deep-breathing exercises | <input type="checkbox"/>  CBT-4 COACH
Use with cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-4) to improve your sleep | <input type="checkbox"/>  ACT COACH
Add acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) tips to daily life |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  CPT COACH
Use with cognitive processing therapy (CPT) to reduce PTSD symptoms | <input type="checkbox"/>  DREAM EZ
Based on imagery rehearsal therapy (IRT) can help diffuse nightmares | <input type="checkbox"/>  CONCUSSION COACH
Identify concussion symptoms and cope with related problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  LIFEARMOR
Take self-assessments and learn more about topics like PTSD, anger, depression and more | <input type="checkbox"/>  MINIFULNESS COACH
Learn to practice mindfulness meditation to live in the present | <input type="checkbox"/>  FEEL ELECTRIC!
Help your grade-school children identify and express their feelings |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  MILD TBI POCKET GUIDE
Access this handy reference when assessing and treating symptoms of mild TBI | <input type="checkbox"/>  PARENTING2GO
Strengthen your relationships with your children | <input type="checkbox"/>  MOVING FORWARD
Learn problem-solving techniques that help you make better decisions |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  PFA MOBILE
Get support as a responder when your job is to provide psychological first aid (PFA) | <input type="checkbox"/>  POSITIVE ACTIVITY JACOPO!
Find local activities to improve your mood and avoid negative thinking | <input type="checkbox"/>  PE COACH
Use with prolonged exposure (PE) therapy to improve results |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  PTSD COACH
Get support in managing PTSD symptoms | <input type="checkbox"/>  STAY QUIT COACH
Get help either while in smoking cessation treatment or to prevent relapse | <input type="checkbox"/>  PROVIDER RESILIENCE
Use when dealing with burnout and compassion fatigue |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  Tactical Breather
Learn to use breathing to control your response during times of stress | <input type="checkbox"/>  THE BIG MOVING ADVENTURE
Help prepare military children emotionally for the stress of moving | <input type="checkbox"/>  T2 MOOD TRACKER
Monitor your emotional health by tracking your moods over time |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/>  VIRTUAL HOPE BOX
Helps reduce symptoms of depression with a digital version of hope box therapy |

WEBSITES

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/>  afterdeployment
afterdeployment.dau.mil
Resources for psychological health and personal growth | <input type="checkbox"/>  PARENTING
veterantraining.va.gov/parenting
Resources to strengthen your parenting skills | <input type="checkbox"/>  Military Families
connectwithmilitaryfamilies.org
Resources for families with young children |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  MOVING FORWARD
veterantraining.va.gov/movingforward
Resources to improve your decision-making | <input type="checkbox"/>  militarykidsconnect
militarykidsconnect.dau.mil
Resources for military children and their parents | 
Developed by the National Center for Behavioral Health & Technology & Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury Center.
Released Aug 2016 |

Virtual Hope Box



Lessons Learned

- Challenge assumptions (gently) that it won't work
- Provide training opportunities for clinicians to build comfort
 - Lighting
 - Audio
 - Eye-contact
- Discuss HIPAA compliance and safety concerns in detail
 - Emergency protocols
 - Gauging appropriateness of patient
- Don't assume which clients will gain the most value (age/demographic)

Directions Forward

- Integration of virtual reality simulators?
- Text therapy?
- Increasing use of mobile applications for direct care
- Increased use of monitoring technology (biofeedback, HRV...)



Thank You for Being Part of the
Community that Supports our Veterans

