

# Engaging Rural Veterans in Improving PTSD Educational Materials

Macgregor A. Montañó, PharmD, BCPP,<sup>1</sup> Nancy C. Bernardy, PhD,<sup>2,3</sup> Kathleen Sherrieb, DrPH,<sup>2,4</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Veterans Affairs Medical Center, White River Junction, VT. <sup>2</sup>National Center for PTSD, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, White River Junction, VT.  
<sup>3</sup>Department of Psychiatry, Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, Hanover, NH. <sup>4</sup>Department of Sociology, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.

## BACKGROUND

- PTSD treatment is complex and poorly understood
- Benzodiazepines are not recommended for PTSD
- Polysedative use can lead to accidental overdose
- Benzodiazepine and polysedative prescribing in PTSD continues – with high rates in rural Veterans

## INNOVATIVE INTERVENTION

- Direct-to-consumer strategies enhance Veteran involvement and shared clinical decision making
- We engaged Veterans in the development of PTSD educational materials

## IMPACT

- Twenty-two Veterans + family members
  - Rural residents of Vermont and New Hampshire
  - Age: 33-62; Era: Vietnam, OIF/OEF/OND
  - Individual and group feedback sessions:  
 VA Residential Recovery Center  
 VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic  
 Lyndon State College, Lyndonville, VT
- 4 infographic posters and 11 brochures created so far with 3,219 distributed nationwide to 257 VA and community sites**

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Rural veteran input during development resulted in more acceptable and accessible PTSD educational products
- Key clinical messages about evidence based treatments and medication risk can be successfully simplified in infographic posters and brochures

## FUTURE WORK

- Continue multifaceted educational strategy to foster access to quality PTSD care
- Healthcare provider feedback sessions

**What Veterans Told Us**

I want to be informed and make my own decision

Comparisons between different treatments – I like that a lot

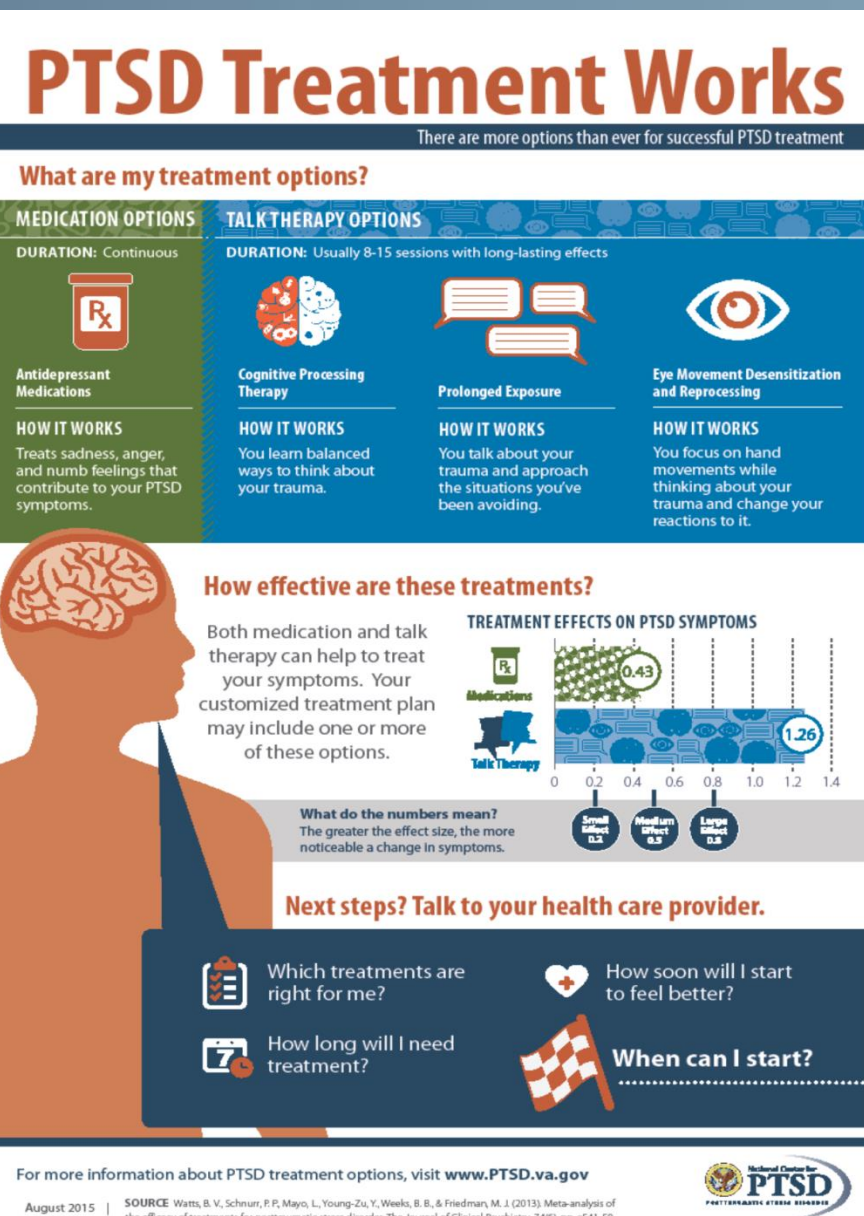
I want it to address pain, sleep, alcohol use, and bad side effects

I would like an 800 number to discuss medications

I want more information about the non-medicine options

Let the Veteran know that it's their choice whether they take medication

I want to know all my options



**PTSD Treatment Works**  
There are more options than ever for successful PTSD treatment

**What are my treatment options?**  
There are more options than ever for successful PTSD treatment

**MEDICATION OPTIONS**  
Duration: Continuous

**TALK THERAPY OPTIONS**  
Duration: Usually 8-15 sessions with long-lasting effects

**HOW IT WORKS**  
These medicines, when used as prescribed, can help you feel better. They work by changing the way your brain processes information.

**How effective are these treatments?**  
Both medication and talk therapy can help to treat your symptoms. Your customized treatment plan may include one or more of these options.

**Next steps? Talk to your health care provider.**

Which treatments are right for me?  
How soon will I start to feel better?  
How long will I need treatment?  
When can I start?

For more information about PTSD treatment options, visit [www.PTSD.va.gov](http://www.PTSD.va.gov)



**SHARING SOLUTIONS**  
PTSD Insomnia Treatment Alternatives

**INSOMNIA OVERVIEW**  
A diagnosis of insomnia requires a complaint of difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or non-restoring sleep that is clinically significant and causes distress or impairment in social, school, or work.

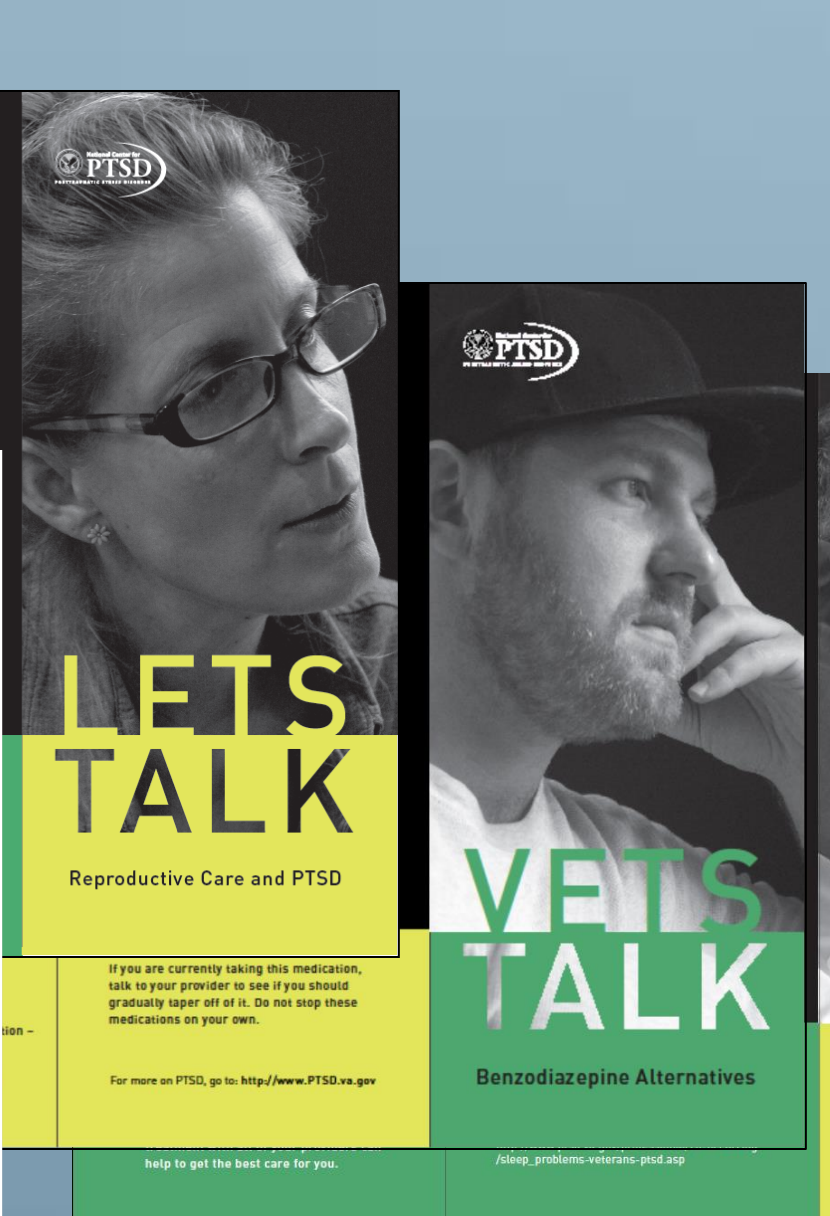
**Recommended Medications**  
PTSD-related insomnia has traditionally been treated with medications. However, research shows that medications may be helpful in management of insomnia, but non-pharmaceutical approaches such as relaxation or another approach to the management of insomnia may be helpful in the long-term. Behavioral treatments, however, should be the recommended treatment for patients with PTSD-related insomnia.



**VETS TALK**  
REPRODUCTIVE CARE

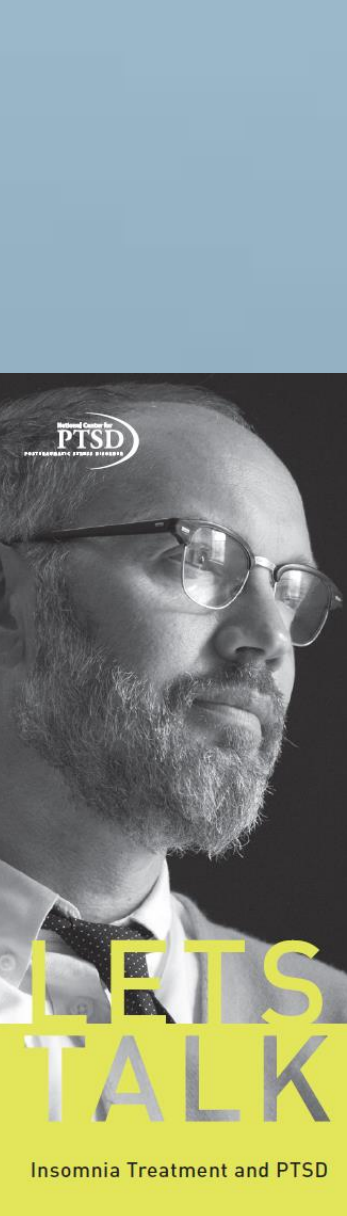
**REPRODUCTIVE CARE**  
When I came home, I was really into some risky behavior and I just didn't care. Luckily, my doctor asked me about this and helped me get contraceptives and therapy to treat my PTSD.

**REPRODUCTIVE CARE**  
I had joint pains all the time – but the I was 19 years old. The drugs helped, but my doctor said that I could try therapy for joint pain. It worked. It became a program. That was reassuring.



**VETS TALK**  
Benzodiazepine Alternatives

**Benzodiazepine Alternatives**  
If you are currently taking this medication, with your provider to help if you are having difficulty tapering off of it. Do not stop these medications on your own.



**VETS TALK**  
Insomnia Treatment and PTSD

**Insomnia Treatment and PTSD**  
If you are currently taking this medication, with your provider to help if you are having difficulty tapering off of it. Do not stop these medications on your own.



**Sound Familiar?**

**ANTI-ANXIETY DRUGS for PTSD, you may be at risk.**

**Safer PTSD Treatments are Available**  
Talk to Your Health Care Provider about Your Options

Safer Effective Medications  
Talk Therapy  
Slow Tapering Plan to Reduce Your Risks



**OVERVIEW OF BENZODIAZEPINES (BZDs)**

**Overview of Benzodiazepines (BZDs)**  
Benzodiazepines are a class of drugs that are used to treat anxiety, insomnia, and muscle spasms. They work by slowing down the activity of the central nervous system.



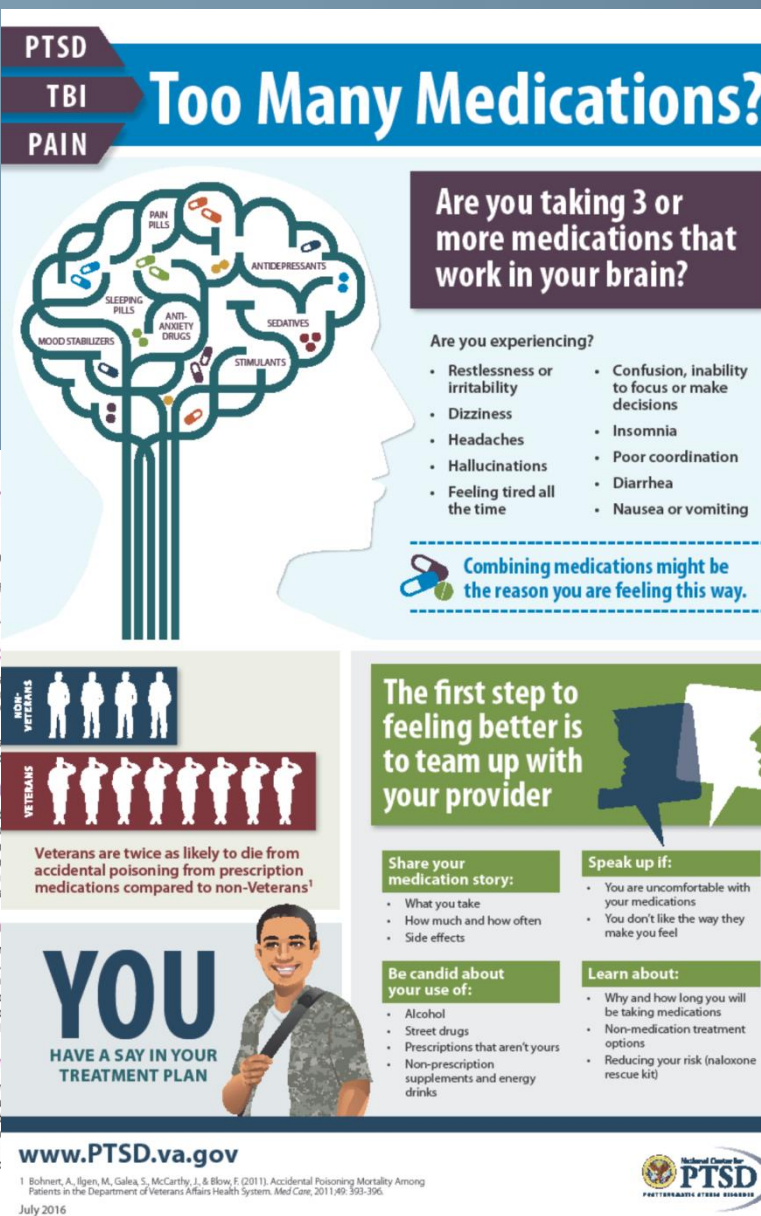
**Assessment for Safe Prescribing with Women: the TARC Assessment**

**Assessment for Safe Prescribing with Women: the TARC Assessment**  
This assessment is designed to help healthcare providers identify potential risks associated with benzodiazepine use in women.



**WOMAN VET**  
PTSD Treatment: YOU HAVE A SAY IN YOUR TREATMENT PLAN

**YOU HAVE A SAY IN YOUR TREATMENT PLAN**  
Veterans are twice as likely to die from accidental poisoning from prescription medications compared to non-Veterans.



**PTSD TBI TBI Too Many Medications?**

**Too Many Medications?**  
Are you taking 3 or more medications that work in your brain?

**Combining medications might be the reason you are feeling this way.**