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Department of Veterans Affairs

Statement of
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Vet Centers have been the VA's first line of contact for troops returning from combat for every war since Viet Nam. For 26 years, Vet Center counselors have provided services for the psychological and social readjustment needs of combat veterans and have worked toward preventing the possible development of more chronic and delayed forms of war-related trauma.

The Seattle Vet Center staff consists of two psychologists, two social workers, one team leader/counselor and an office manager. Our current caseload is 315 veterans of which 81 are Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) veterans. The Under Secretary for Health has approved the hiring of an additional 100 positions nationwide to provide outreach services to returning OIF/OEF veterans. The Seattle Vet Center filled one of these positions last January when we were fortunate enough to hire Dr. Michael Colson, a retired Navy Commander and psychologist.

Dr. Colson has served multiple tours with marines and sailors, including operational tours in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other areas in the Persian Gulf. He has provided on-base briefings to over 5,000 returnees from Iraq/Afghanistan. Following his educational briefings, Dr. Colson provides individual sessions with veterans who indicate they may be experiencing readjustment problems. These individuals are, in turn, referred for follow-up visits with other Vet Center Counselors or community based providers in their area. He has also been able to establish on-site office space at Ft. Lewis, the Everett Naval Station and the NAS Whidbey Island Naval Air Station. By having office space available at these facilities, he is able to assist returnees and deal with readjustment issues in a community setting. He is also actively involved in providing services to returning service members on medical hold at Madigan Army Hospital. Today Dr. Colson is at the Ft. Lewis Army Base providing briefings to approximately 500 veterans.

The Seattle Vet Center, along with the Puget Sound Health Care System, VA Regional Office, and the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs have collaborated in the development of a DVD that we are providing to returning OIF/OEF veterans regarding readjustment counseling services available in Washington State. The DVD discusses readjustment issues and has assisted many returning OIF/OEF veterans better understand their military-related readjustment needs.

Treatment modalities at the Seattle Vet Center include individual and group readjustment counseling, psychometric evaluation, grief counseling, sexual trauma counseling, and benefits assistance. When specific Vet Center services are not indicated, referrals are made to appropriate community agencies.

As the Seattle Vet Center is the entry point for many veterans into the VA system, each veteran is, in turn, referred to the Seattle VA Medical Center's Deployment Clinic for a comprehensive physical and needs assessment.

The Seattle Vet Center also operates a Fee Contract Program, with contract counselors available on the Kitsap Peninsula in Sequim and north of Seattle in Everett. The contract program allows the Vet Center to provide services in communities in which the veteran lives. We currently have 74 individuals on the contract program of which 18 are OIF/OEF veterans.