



Association of VA Psychologist Leaders

Essential Healthcare for Veterans: Psychologists Improve Lives

ANXIETY DISORDERS: THE NATION'S LARGEST MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

Anxiety disorders represent the single largest mental health problem in the country. The prevalence of anxiety disorders surpasses that of all other mental health disorders, including depression and substance abuse.¹ Anxiety disorders cost the nation over 40 billion dollars per year in direct services and lost productivity.² Although chronic and disabling, anxiety disorders can be effectively treated with techniques developed and tested by psychologists.

- Anxiety disorders cost the nation an estimated \$42.3 billion annually, or approximately \$1500 per sufferer. Fully 54% of these costs are associated with excess utilization of primary health care services.²
- In recent years, anxiety disorders accounted for approximately 31% of total costs of mental health care, compared to 22% for mood disorders and 20% for schizophrenia.³
- Anxiety disorders are particularly prevalent in primary care settings. Fully 18% of primary care patients have significant anxiety symptoms and patients with anxiety disorders seek out medical specialists in disproportionate numbers.³
- Anxiety disorders are chronic and may last for decades or even a lifetime in the absence of effective treatment.⁴

In recent years, enormous advances have been made in the understanding and treatment of anxiety disorders. Cognitive-behavioral treatments that have been largely developed and evaluated by psychologists have performed well in controlled studies and are recommended in NIMH practice guidelines for the anxiety disorders. There has been a proliferation of excellent books and treatment manuals written in recent years by psychologists to train clinicians and guide empirically supported treatment.

Psychologists are trained in evidence-based treatments for anxiety disorders. Psychologists are uniquely qualified to train mental health professionals in providing effective treatment for anxiety disorders. Therefore, in order to provide the highest quality of care, psychologists should be integrally involved in the treatment plans of veterans with anxiety disorders.

See other side for references.

¹ Kessler, R. C., McGonagle, K. A., Zhao, S., Nelson, C. B., Hughes, M., Eshleman, S., Wittchen, H.-U., & Kendler, K. S. (1994). Lifetime and 12-month prevalence of DSM-III-R psychiatric disorders in the United States: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey. Archives of General Psychiatry, *51*, 8-19.

² Greenburg, P. E., Sisitsky, T., Kessler, R. C., Finkelstein, S. N., Berndt, E. R., Davidson, J. R. T., Ballenger, J. C., & Fyer, A. J. (1999). The economic burden of anxiety disorders in the 1990s. Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, *60*, 427-435.

³ Rice, D. P., & Miller, L. S. (1993). The economic burden of mental disorders. Advances in Health Economics and Health Service Research, *14*, 37-53.

⁴ Barlow, D. H. (2002). Anxiety and its Disorders: The nature and treatment of anxiety and panic, 2nd ed. New York, Guilford Press.