

## Developing a Volunteer Program to Support Addiction Treatment Services at the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System

Emma G. Offenberg; Pamela Gail D. Lagera, MD; Jennifer K. Shah, BA, BS; Nicholas M.G. Friedman, BA; Steven R. Chan, MD, MBA

### COMMUNITY PARTNER

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Healthcare System

### ABSTRACT

Background: Military veterans are at an increased risk for substance use disorders (SUD) due to increased prevalence of PTSD and other environmental stressors. The Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Healthcare System (VAPAHCS) offers multiple treatment programs for SUD. To support continuity of care for veterans within VA Palo Alto Addictions Treatment Services, we launched the "Mental Health/Addictions Volunteer + Innovations Clinic."

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Approach: Development for this program began in the summer of 2022, and volunteer recruitment began at Stanford University in September 2022. Applications were open to undergraduates from all backgrounds. A needs assessment was conducted to identify needs within the VAPAHCS Addiction Treatment Services to which volunteers could contribute. Identified needs included developing an online database of local SUD treatment resources, assisting veterans with telehealth access and other technology, and sending harm reduction materials to Veterans.

Outcomes: To date, over 15 volunteers have been accepted. Volunteers began work on this project in January of 2023. Volunteers have completed at least four hours of volunteer service every two weeks, according to their schedules. Preliminary feedback has revealed that volunteers appreciate opportunities for direct engagement with clinicians and veterans. Ongoing barriers to program development include the logistical challenges of onboarding undergraduate students in a VA healthcare system.

Conclusions: Ensuring efficient care for veterans with SUD is essential for the wellbeing of VA patients. This novel volunteer program addresses this issue by equipping clinicians and patients with resources to access and navigate treatment. The program will continue recruiting undergraduate volunteers and continue building our portfolio of resources.

*We thank the volunteers and our community partners at VAPAHCS for their dedication and commitment to Veterans suffering from SUDs.*