Enhancing Women’s Recruitment in VA Clinical Trials: Multisite Evaluation of a Novel Strategy

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BACKGROUND

• Women are historically under-represented in Veterans Health Administration (VA) research
• The rapid growth of this population necessitates a stronger evidence base to guide gender-sensitive interventions and care delivery

METHODS

• The VA Women’s Health Practice-Based Research Network (WH-PBRN) piloted a novel Women’s Enhanced Recruitment Process (WERP) initiative to understand what efforts are working well or not working well to recruit women into VA research
• Activities to enhance recruitment of women were implemented at 6 of 17 national study sites of VA Cooperative Studies Program Study #591: Comparative Effectiveness Research in Veterans with PTSD (Figure 1)

SETTING & PARTICIPANTS

• Ten of 17 study sites opted to implement the VFFs to male and female study participants (N=257 Veterans)
• Staff from 15 of 17 study sites participated in qualitative interviews (N= 42 staff), including Local Site Investigators, National Study Staff, Study Coordinators, and WH-PBRN Site Leads

RESEARCH STAFF INTERVIEW RESULTS:

• Recruitment strategies
  – Finding champions to promote recruitment
  – Nurturing relationships to facilitate buy-in
  – Capitalizing on the sense of duty to help other women Veterans
  – Ensuring the study finds ways to integrate into clinic flow
• Recruitment challenges
  – Multiple studies recruiting from a small pool of women
  – Need for more flexibility to recruit beyond flyers, mailings, phone calls
  – Competing demands women have (ex: caregiving)
  – Facility-level cultural barriers to recruiting women
  – Welcoming setting for women Veterans
  – Difficult for study team to identify where women receive care
  – Ability to accommodate participants’ preference for female providers
• Recruitment suggestions
  – Increasing awareness about women Veterans amongst study team and veterans
  – Addressing participant’s logistic barriers (ex: caregiving, travel)
  – Appealing to aspects of a study that benefit a participant.

RESULTS

Where did you first hear about this study?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where did you first hear about this study?</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Care Provider</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA Other</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Flyer</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Why did you decide to take part in this study?

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• 100% of women vs. 88% of men were satisfied/very satisfied with how they were approached for the study
• What did you like about the way you were approached?

“Worked with my limited availability”
“I felt pleased to be asked for my input”

“I think it would be beneficial to give flyers out in some of the groups where women Veterans are attending”

CONCLUSION

Veteran and staff data gathered from the WERP initiative can inform future multisite research approaches to improving women Veterans’ recruitment, such as:
• Integrating procedures to target women into study protocols, including considerations on how and where women are approached
• Training and education measures to increase study staff awareness around women’s health
• Engaging with front-line women’s health clinicians

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