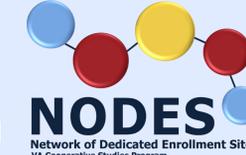


# Enhancing Women's Recruitment in VA Clinical Trials: Multisite Evaluation of a Novel Strategy



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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)*



Figure 1

- Veteran Feedback Form (VFF)**<sup>1</sup> obtained Veteran input on recruitment experience
- Research staff semi-structured telephone interviews** elicited experiences around recruitment of women Veterans in clinical research

<sup>1</sup>Smalles P, Reider C, Hallarn RK, Hafer L, Wallace L, Miser WF. Implementation of a Research Participant Satisfaction Survey at an Academic Medical Center. *Clinical researcher (Alexandria, VA)*. 2016;30(3):42-47.

## 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

## RESULTS

### VETERAN FEEDBACK FORM (VFF) RESULTS:

- 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?**

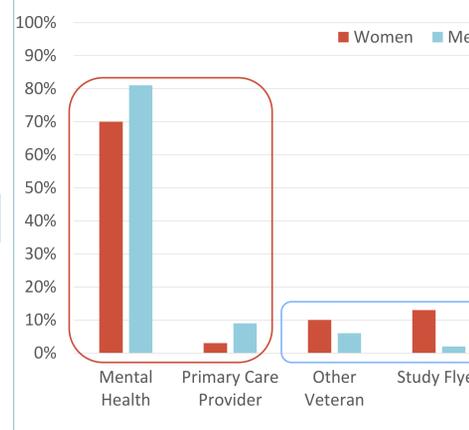
"Worked with my limited availability"

"I felt pleased to be asked for my input"

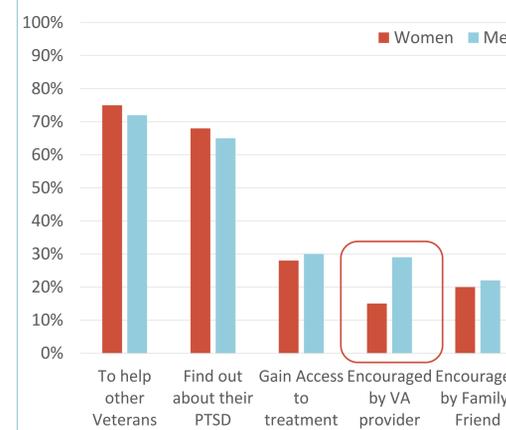
- What could we have done better?**

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

### Where did you first hear about this study?



### Why did you decide to take part in this study?



### 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
  - Unwelcoming 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 logistical barriers (ex: caregiving, travel)
  - Appealing to aspects of a study that benefit a participant.

"The women that signed up were very invested because of the way we presented it: 'We can't look at what's going to be helpful and effective for female Veterans if you don't participate in research. So your participation is not only going to help hopefully you, but really to help [what] we can do for other female Veterans as well.'"

"I wish we could be more flexible with how we communicate... I think if we improve or technologic interfaces, giving people more options... Just trying to make it easier and more time efficient for busy people."

"I did find that a few of the providers were...a little more cautious about referring [women] to us."

"when I told [women] that this study was a part of an initiative to increase women enrollment, they were pleasantly surprised that there was a research [study] that even cared that much to try and increase female enrollment."

## 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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