



Most People With PTSD Don't Get The Help They Need

by Randy Schorfheide
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ALTON – June is recognized as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) month – where It's estimated that there are currently about 12 million people in the United States living with PTSD.



Even though PTSD treatments are effective and accessible, most people don't get the help they need. Everyone with PTSD - whether they are a Veteran or civilian survivor of sexual assault, serious accident, natural disaster, or other traumatic event - needs to know that treatments really do work and can lead to a better quality of life.

Even children experience PTSD. “Children who experience PTSD may have nightmares or sleep problems. They may experience intense emotions such as fear, anger and/or sadness,” says Jill Schreiber, LCSW, PhD, psychotherapist, OSF Saint Anthony’s Psychological Services. “They can be triggered by things that remind them of the event. Children often recreate the event in play. It is helpful for children to get professional help to process their feelings and experiences.”

PTSD is a mental health problem. PTSD can only develop after someone goes through or witnesses a life-threatening event. It's normal to have stress reactions to these types of events, and most people start to feel better after a few weeks or months.

PTSD is common among veterans returning from war who experience flashbacks, nightmares, and extreme distress when reminded of past triggering events. Less well known is the incidence of PTSD among healthcare workers, especially those on the frontlines of a pandemic such as what took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health professionals are somewhat prepared to deal with the psychological trauma of witnessing illness and death at close quarters. But the increasingly overwhelming conditions of a pandemic can leave many health providers unprepared for the mental health fallback.

The need to make difficult life-and-death decisions in a demanding and unpredictable environment, coupled with the fear of contracting the disease, can put healthcare workers at risk of developing PTSD. PTSD often co-occurs with conditions such as chronic pain due to fibromyalgia, RSD, and CRPS, or work-related injuries.

PTSD manifests in many ways. Essentially, it is the persistence of traumatic thoughts and memories long after a stressful event has occurred. Effective treatment for PTSD requires an interdisciplinary approach. The biopsychosocial model practiced at Institutes of Health is an evidence-based treatment modality for complex conditions like PTSD.

“Clinical psychology has made great strides over the last several years in developing evidence-based methods of treating PTSD,” says Ari Lakritz, PsyD, clinical psychologist, OSF Saint Anthony’s Psychological Services. “The treatment option with the strongest research backing today are cognitive processing therapy, which targets the distressing thoughts and feelings associated with trauma, and prolonged exposure therapy, which focuses more on his behavioral symptoms.”

PTSD symptoms can make it very challenging for frontline healthcare workers to do their job. Some of the consequences of PTSD in health professionals include:

- Depression and anxiety
- Emotional numbing and avoidance
- Sleep disturbance (insomnia)
- Excessive alcohol use
- Suicidal ideation
- Chronic pain and opioid dependence

If you or someone you know is or may be suffering from PTSD, more information on diagnosis and treatment options can be obtained by contacting OSF Saint Anthony's Psychological Services by visiting www.osfsaintanthonys.org or by calling (618) 474-6240.

About OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center: A 49-bed Rural Health designated acute care hospital in Alton, Illinois, [OSF Saint Anthony's](http://www.osfsaintanthonys.org) serves the residents of Madison, Jersey and Macoupin counties. It is home to OSF Moeller Cancer Center, which provides the latest diagnostic tools and treatment for patients in a relaxing environment. OSF Saint Anthony's also provides 24-hour access to a physician-staffed emergency department, in addition to cardiovascular, neurology, pulmonology, surgical, rehabilitation services and more. OSF Saint Anthony's is fully accredited by the Joint Commission for Healthcare Facilities, American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer, American College of Radiology, CMS 4-Star Rating, American Heart Association, IDPH and TJC Primary Stroke Center. OSF Saint Anthony's is part of OSF HealthCare – an integrated health system with 15 hospitals in Illinois and Michigan and robust Innovation and Digital Health divisions that provide access to specialty care and remote monitoring, helping people receive the care they need close to home. [OSF HealthCare](http://www.osfhealthcare.org) is operated by The Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis.