

There is hope -- and help -- for those suffering from PTSD

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By Leslie A. Morland

Lani was sexually assaulted while walking in her neighborhood at night. Since then, she has had vivid nightmares, felt tremendous shame, and replayed every detail of the assault in her mind over and over, imagining what she could have done differently to prevent it from happening.

Jim was medically discharged from the Army after returning from his fourth tour in Afghanistan. Since his return to civilian life, he feels constantly irritable. He frequently has angry outbursts when driving or in crowded places. This has strained his relationship with his wife and children.

Noelani is a loving, joyful mother of four. Her friends and co-workers would never suspect she was sexually abused as a child, but a recent trigger has put the abuse at the front her mind. She feels afraid almost all the time without knowing why. She has become overly vigilant about her children's safety.

These experiences may seem vastly different, but they have one thing in common: each individual is experiencing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). After a horrific event, such as combat or rape, many people have trouble healing their emotional wounds.

Their trauma continues in their mind. They might feel fear when confronted with people, places or circumstances that remind them of the event. They might feel constantly angry, keyed up or "on guard." They might relive the event, avoid thinking or talking about it, or they may just feel numb.



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This is the reality of the estimated 5.2 million people in the U.S. who are currently suffering from PTSD. More than half the population will experience one or more traumatic events in their lifetime. Of those who do, about 8-10 percent will go on to develop PTSD. Research has identified several effective therapies for PTSD and for those who have undergone treatment, many have found peace once again.

This important topic is the reason I am writing today, on National PTSD Awareness Day, offering a message of hope to those suffering from PTSD and of encouragement for family members who want to help. If you suspect you or a loved one may be suffering from PTSD, "Take the Step" to

encourage that person to access treatment.

Numerous resources are available to help those affected by PTSD. The National Center for PTSD (NC-PTSD, part of the Department of Veterans Affairs) will be available today in the lobby of the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System Ambulatory Care Clinic — 459 Patterson Road, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. —to talk with veterans and their families about the symptoms, treatment options and steps for connecting to services. Call 1-800-214-1306 for information.

The NC-PTSD currently offers free evidence-based treatment for women civilian and veterans with PTSD. This is part of a federally funded clinical trial that is showing real promise. (Call 538-2522 or visit www.pathwaystochangehawaii.com to learn more.)

A wealth of information and resources — including a checklist of symptoms and even a companion app for your smart phone — also is available on the National Center for PTSD's website, www.ptsd.va.gov.

June is National PTSD Awareness month. Today, we hope that those who are needlessly suffering will take the step to explore treatment options. It's a brave and important step, but PTSD does not have to be life-long; there is treatment that provides relief, healing and recovery.

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