

The Royal College of General Practitioners Veteran Friendly Accreditation Programme

What is it?

A voluntary scheme to help primary healthcare providers better identify, understand, and refer Veterans, where appropriate, to Veteran-specific NHS services. This provides better healthcare for the patient, whilst practices benefit from being able to directly access the correct services for their Veterans.

Becoming accredited as Veteran Friendly is based around having a Veterans' Clinical Lead, who can be any member of the clinical team, in each General Practice. The idea is that the Veterans' Clinical Lead can develop knowledge and experience of Veterans' health issues as well as awareness of and access to Veteran-specific care.

The Veteran-specific care available includes:

- **Op COURAGE:** the Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Service
- **Op RESTORE** (formerly The Veterans' Trauma Network) which allows GPs to use a single email to refer Veterans with Service-attributable injuries (including hearing loss directly to specialist care).

Who is a Veteran and why do they need specific services?

A Veteran is anyone who has served in the British Armed Forces (Navy, Army, or Air Force), as a Regular or Territorial/Reservist for one day.

Service in the Armed Forces is a unique occupation, with the potential for placing individuals and their families under extraordinary physical and psychological stresses. This is recognised in the Armed Forces Covenant, a promise by the nation to ensure that those who serve or have served in the UK Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.

52% of Veterans have a long-term illness or disability, compared to 35% in the general adult population.

The CQC considers practices that are accredited as being Veteran Friendly are meeting the needs of a potentially vulnerable group of patients.

What are the benefits of being accredited as Veteran Friendly?

These include:

- Practices being supported to provide timely, appropriate and high-quality care to this discrete patient group.
- The avoidance of repeat referrals, potentially reducing workload for the practice and other health and social care providers.
- Improved rapport with Veterans. Practices who have become accredited report an increased number of individuals identifying as Veterans, as well as more Veterans seeking help and engaging with GPs.
- Improved coding and better epidemiological data capture have also been reported by accredited practices as benefits of the programme. 98% of accredited practices recommend the programme.

How does a practice achieve accreditation?

A practice must have a CQC rating of good or higher in order to apply.

The application form is available on the RCGP website and comprises 25 questions, which are intended to gather information about the practice. It is not an exam!

The practice is then asked to commit to the following actions:

Ask patients registering with the practice if they have ever served with the UK Armed Forces (Regular or Territorial/Reserves) and code this in the patient's electronic record (recommended that the term 'Military Veteran' is used).

Appoint a Veterans' Clinical Lead within the practice. This can be any member of the clinical team who is able to make referrals.

The Veterans' Clinical Lead is required to undertake initial training, which is provided online by the RCGP at no cost once the practice has been accepted for accreditation. This takes about 2.5 hours to complete. They are then required to stay up to date with research and innovations relating to Veterans' healthcare, ensure that the practice is meeting the health commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant and be available to provide advice to colleagues as well as potentially seeing Veterans themselves.

What happens once a practice is accredited?

On accreditation, practices are provided with an information pack detailing Veteran-specific referral pathways and sources of additional support and advice. They also receive newsletters and updates on the Veteran-specific issues, and details of additional training that is available.

A recently recorded FAQ session on Veteran Friendly Accreditation is available at the link below:
Becoming a veteran friendly accredited GP practice - NHS Arden & GEM CSU (ardengemcsu.nhs.uk)

More information about all aspects of Veteran Friendly Accreditation is available (without log in) on the RCGP website Veterans' healthcare toolkit: Veteran friendly GP practice accreditation (rcgp.org.uk)

Also available are a series of excellent podcasts and webinars discussing the care of Veterans
Veterans' healthcare toolkit: Learning resources (rcgp.org.uk)

For further information please contact either your local Veteran Lead or the RCGP Veteran Friendly Accreditation Regional Lead, Dr Jo Ferguson at joanne.ferguson15@nhs.net