

HELP FOR VETERANS

HopeHealth focuses on seriously ill

By Cynthia McCormick

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Older veterans diagnosed with a serious illness sometimes rely on traits they learned during military service to cope — and that's not always a good thing, health officials say.

The stoicism and ability to withstand pain that got veterans through basic training and even combat may make it difficult for them to ask for appropriate pain relief or other help to which they are entitled, said Ellen McCabe, a nurse in charge of education with HopeHealth in Hyannis.

"The idea to go inside yourself away from things you can't control comes right back," she said.

To break down self-imposed barriers to care, HopeHealth is holding a program called Caring for Veterans Experiencing the Impact of Serious Illness on May 11 in Plymouth. It follows on the heels of a similar event held in Barnstable in the fall and is open free of charge to veterans and their families, caregivers, professionals who work with veterans and the public.

The presentation will provide information on subjects ranging from community services to providing support and camaraderie for the veterans.

Presenters include McCabe, who is director of professional education for HopeHealth; Ann Geagan, HopeHealth's director of bereavement; Melissa Weidman, HopeHealth's director of community outreach; and Steve Morrissey, a veteran and a volunteer with HopeHealth.

Military training teaches people — usually young people — how to bear challenges from the discomfort of scratchy bed linens in a noisy barrack to

surviving in a prisoner-of-war camp, McCabe said.

The stoicism imprinted upon young service people can make it hard for ill veterans to ask for appropriate levels of pain relief, even when their families hear them moaning at night. And veterans of combat may have a particularly hard time opening up to families about how they feel during their illness because they have learned to keep trauma to themselves, McCabe said.

Combat veterans may see themselves as protecting their family, she said: "You don't want them to know what you experienced. They might even think what would be the point of sharing it?"

But services are available, from pain relief and nursing to housekeeping and visits with HopeHealth's cadre of volunteers who are also veterans, McCabe said. She said HopeHealth also has a new program during which it honors veterans with a pinning ceremony, based on the We Honor Veterans program.

One way to get veterans to accept help is to let them know what a relief it is for family members, McCabe said.

"When they think of the stress the illness is putting on their loved ones they might let the services come in," she said.

—Follow Cynthia McCormick on Twitter: @Cmccormickct.

Caring for Veterans Experiencing the Impact of Serious Illness will be held from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. May 11 at the Plymouth Senior Center, 44 Nook Road, Plymouth. A continental breakfast will be served. There is no charge, but preregistration is suggested as space is limited. To register, visit HopeHealthCo.org/CaringforVets, email Info@HopeHealthCo.org or call 774-487-3667.

The program is being held in collaboration with the Plymouth Veterans Services Office, Plymouth Senior Center and Old Colony Elder Services.

