

## Title

Middle East Conflict Era Veterans' Healthcare Preferences in Relationship to Military Service: A Quality Improvement Project

## Abstract

During the Middle East Conflict Era, 1990 through 2021, 7.8 million American men and women volunteered for military service. As these service members separate from the military, 72% seek healthcare in the civilian community. Although the Joining Forces Initiative has encouraged civilian healthcare providers to ask patients "have you ever served in the military?" and to initiate specialized care when needed, the literature reveals this seldom occurs. The purpose of this project was to discover whether veterans want providers to ask about their military service, whether they believe knowledge of the health risks they experienced during military service would improve quality of care, and what they identify as their most significant health concerns. A survey that included open-ended questions was completed by 35 Middle East Conflict Era veterans who used the Veterans Resource Center on a large southern California majority minority university campus. The data were analyzed through statistical calculations and narrative analysis. Results revealed that 97% of participants believed it important for providers to include their military history in health assessments, and 97% of participants believed this information might or could improve the accuracy of assessment and quality of care. Veterans noted current concerns for existing physical and mental health problems, as well as worries about future health problems resulting from hazardous exposures. Veterans' narrative responses were candid and forthright. This project was limited by the small ( $n = 35$ ), regional, and all-student sample. The survey captured active duty and activated reservist status during the Middle East Conflict Era, but lacked clarity about reservist not called to active duty status. The survey recorded the participants' current age but not their age during time of deployment or active duty in the Middle East Conflict Era, which extended over a span of approximately 30 years. This information could have added an increased depth of understanding of the survey results. Further study should include other geographic areas and campuses, veterans who are not students, and Viet Nam veterans who have been in the civilian healthcare system for 40 to 50 years. Healthcare providers should be encouraged to obtain targeted education about disorders associated with military service during the Middle East Conflict Era and recommended treatment.