



# Camaraderie Based Exercise vs. Anxiety, Depression, Pain and Suicide



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# The Problem

- Suicide recently moved up to the 9th leading cause of death in the United States [1,49]
- 124 Americans kill themselves every day [50]
- 20-27 US Armed Forces Veterans die by suicide every day [2, 50]
- Anxiety, Depression, Pain and PTSD are often precursors to suicide [9,10,11,12,13,50]
- Opioid use disorder is now associated with highest suicide rates.[50]
- Two-thirds (66%) of veteran suicides are by those not using the VA for services [2]
  - Why? - Lack of trust, ineligibility for services, proximity to nearest VAMC, poor continuity of care, lack of established therapeutic alliance. (Angell, personal example)
- **Lack of physical exercise has been linked to anxiety, depression, and pain for decades.** [21,22,23,47,50]



# Solutions Identified

- More non-VA mental health, fitness and advocacy resources
  - WSF, OVF, VFW, DAV, PHH, American Legion, Team Rubicon,
- Improved client intake screening measures for Anxiety, Depression, Pain and PTSD
- New (modern) approaches in combined mental and physical health treatment modalities
  - Operation Vet Fit - Camaraderie Based Exercise Events (CBEE)
  - Warrior Surf Foundation - Veteran/Family Surf Clinics & Yoga
  - Exercise and fitness prescription as an evidenced based modality (*needs educational curriculum, only a select few have both psychology and fitness backgrounds*)
  - Conference flash poll on where current services are provided: (*In office or during exercise*)
- Technology based formulas for early screening, treatment and long-term continuity of care
  - Operation Vet Fit - Case intake system: “The Formula”



# What We Know

- Physical Exercise results in improved mental and physical health outcomes [21,22,23,47] (Treating the root cause, not the symptom)
  - Improves overall physical health and mental health
  - Reduces anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms
  - Reduces chronic pain
- Camaraderie based exercise events reduce depression, anxiety, pain and PTSD symptoms [33,34,35,36,37,48]
  - Through social connectedness by way of mutual “suffering” & achievement
  - By re-igniting a sense of personal belonging
  - Providing a future event over the time horizon, thus creating purpose.

# How We Are Stopping Veteran Suicide

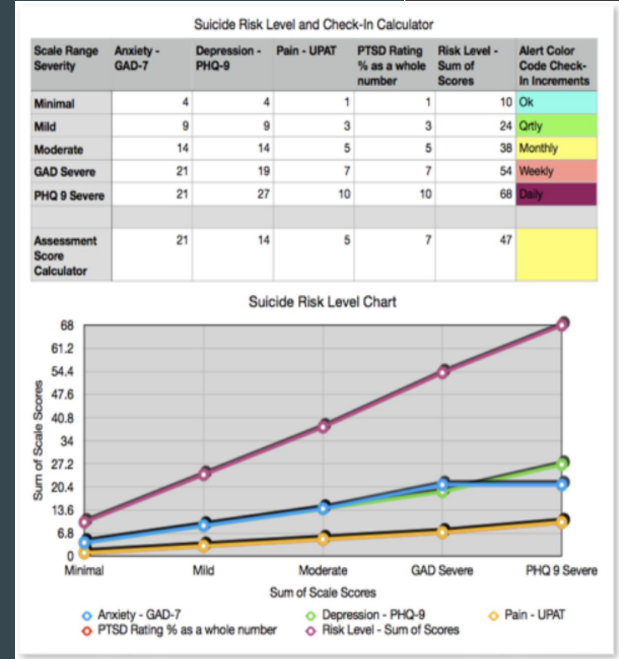


- Case intake screening for anxiety, depression, pain and PTSD
  - GAD-7 - Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale [39]
  - PHQ-9 - Patient Health Questionnaire [40]
  - UPAT - Universal Pain Assessment Tool [41,42,43]
  - PTSD - Based on VA rating or administer (PCL-5)
- Calculating Risk Factor Score
  - Using the “Formula” <https://apple.news/AgigjQSgoQAWbt5eAR9ojMw>
- Establishing severity: “Color Code” for targeted client case treatment plan
  - Red, Yellow, Green
- Implementing Effective Treatment Plans
  - Using non-conventional therapeutic settings (Gym, beach, surfing, trails, camping, bike ride, walk, mud run, underwater competitive physical exercise). *Almost never sitting in an office while sedentary.*

# “The Formula”

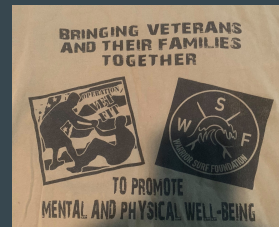
- Is the result of **sympiotic collaboration** between former DOD Special Operations Commanders, Mental Health experts, Combat Veterans and an analysis of available data on veteran and civilian suicides.

$$\sum d + p + pts + a = R_f$$



# Interventions

- By incorporating exercise, and social connectedness (camaraderie) with psychodynamic approaches to mental health treatment (CPT, CBT, PE, PST, SFT, MI, & EMDR) we've been able to both measure and observe reductions in anxiety, depression, pain and PTSD symptoms.
- When we reduce these symptoms, we argue, we also reduce the risk factors towards suicide.
- We have not had a single suicide since our founding in 2012.





# References

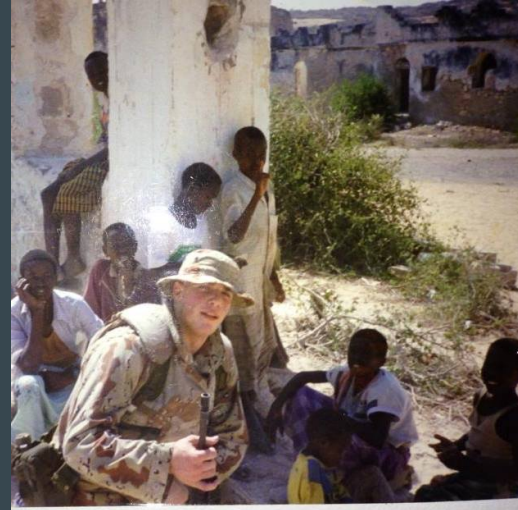
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Daniel R. Gaita, MA, LMSW, a United States Marine turned veterans' advocate. He is the Founder of Operation Vet Fit, a 501C(3), combat veteran advocacy agency recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services for his groundbreaking research on veteran suicide causes and solutions. He is a South Carolina Licensed Social Worker specializing in Mental Health and Military Families; a volunteer research assistant at the Citadel, inducted into the Phi Alpha Honor Society while a graduate student at the University of Southern California, also a Presidential Management Fellowship Finalist; a participant in Military Clinical Skills Training and research conducted through the Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families. Dan earned his BA in Psychology from combined studies at the University of Connecticut and Western Connecticut State University; His first Masters degree in Organizational Leadership at Gonzaga University with a concentration in Servant Leadership; Later completed his second Masters degree in Clinical Social Work with a concentration on Mental Health and Military Families from combined studies at Fordham University and the University of Southern California.



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