



American Academy of Nursing

transforming health care policy and practice through nursing knowledge

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The Question Your Healthcare Provider Will Ask at Your Next Visit

Leading Nursing Organization to Improve Quality of Veterans' Healthcare

Have you ever served in the military? is a simple but very important question that nurses and other healthcare providers will now be asking their patients. Military service members may have been exposed to environments that could lead to adverse health risks—risks that healthcare providers need to know to serve veterans better.

On Labor Day, Cheryl Sullivan, the CEO of the American Academy of Nursing, announced at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) conference a new awareness campaign to improve the health of veterans. The campaign, "*Have you ever served in the military?*," encourages healthcare providers to ask about their patients' military background.

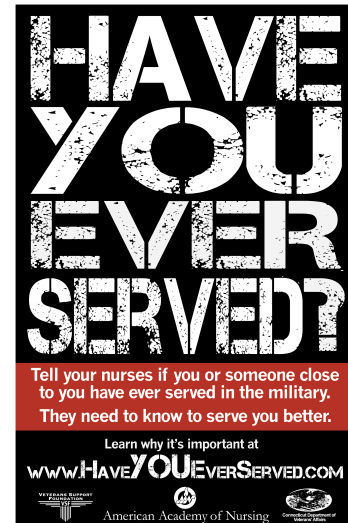
"This single question, 'Have you ever served in the military?,' asserts Linda Schwartz, a fellow in the Academy and commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Veteran's Affairs, "can be the key to timely and adequate assessments, diagnosis, and treatment."

Less than 30% of all veterans receive care within the VA healthcare system. Harold Kudler, MD, associate director, VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center, noted that "56% of community providers don't routinely ask their patients about being a current or former member of the armed forces or a family member." While VA healthcare providers may be familiar to military-related occupational and environmental hazards, many civilian healthcare providers may not be fully aware. Through *Have you ever served in the military?*, the American Academy of Nursing seeks to address these major gaps in veterans' healthcare.

NASDVA, which represents all US states and territories, endorsed *Have you ever served in the military?*. The NASDVA resolution states that this campaign "will ultimately raise the quality of health assessments and, most importantly, appropriate diagnosis and treatment of the military members."

(<http://bit.ly/AAN-NASDVA>)

Have you ever served in the military? represents the Academy's commitment to First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden's Joining Forces campaign, to mobilize all sectors of the community to support veterans and their families. Nurses, healthcare's equivalent to the boots on the ground, are uniquely positioned to facilitate this fundamental change of ensuring vital information is obtained and recorded in order to improve the quality of healthcare provided to our veterans and their families.



One example of a veteran health risk not common to civilians: Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, who worked or slept near open-air burn pits, may have been exposed to multiple toxins. These toxins can lead to an increased risk for respiratory illnesses and a variety of cancers, including leukemia.

Nurses and other healthcare providers will be given a pocket card listing the most common health concerns linked to military service, as well as questions the provider should ask the veteran. This information will assist providers to obtain a more complete military service history and identify possible health factors or illnesses related to such service.

The Academy's Military & Veterans Health Expert Panel, formed in 2011, studies service members' health care and develops policy recommendations. To facilitate outreach and proper referral for veterans, the Military & Veterans Health Expert Panel recommended launching the *Have you ever served in the military?* campaign.

The Academy, with the assistance and cooperation of state commissioners of veterans affairs, is launching *Have you ever served in the military?* in Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

The Academy estimates this initial launch will benefit approximately one million veterans. Subsequently, *Have you ever served in the military?* will be rolled out in all fifty states over a three-year period.

In addition to the American Academy of Nursing, *Have you ever served in the military?* is generously sponsored by the Veterans Support Foundation and the Connecticut Department of Veteran's Affairs.

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For more information, visit www.HaveYouEverServed.com.

About the Academy

The American Academy of Nursing (www.AANnet.org) serves the public and the nursing profession by advancing health policy and practice through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of nursing knowledge. The Academy's more than 2,000 fellows are nursing's most accomplished leaders in education, management, practice, and research. They have been recognized for their extraordinary contributions to nursing and health care. Over 90 Academy fellows have served or currently serve in the uniformed military.