

## MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA [MST]

- What judges should know about MST
  - Definition of MST comes from 38 USC § 1720D, but in general it is sexual assault or repeated threatening, sexual harassment that occurred during a veteran's military service
  - MST is an experience, not a diagnosis
  - Both men & women experience MST
  - Among some Veterans, MST is associated with:
    - Suicide
    - Both mental & physical health problems, even decades later
    - Drinking & drug use
    - Aggressive outbursts
    - Confusing, sometimes reckless, behaviors
    - Decrease in normal coping strategies
    - Male victims questioning their sexual identity
  - An MST history can affect response to court-ordered programs
  - MST victims suffer with power & control issues
  - MST is frequently underreported; victims are often reluctant to disclose
- Every VA healthcare facility provides treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST, even if not reported at the time of occurrence; Veterans do not need documentation of their experiences or to have a VA disability rating to receive treatment
- The Veterans Health Administration [VHA]<sup>1</sup> outpatient, inpatient and residential services for treatment related to MST<sup>2</sup>
  - A vet just asks for treatment for MST & it will be given<sup>3</sup>
  - All treatment for MST is provided free of charge
  - Every VA facility has an MST Coordinator to assist in accessing care. Veterans with questions about eligibility or other issues that might interfere with accessing services should contact the facility MST Coordinator to discuss possibilities
  - VHA Vet Centers<sup>4</sup> may be a good option for active duty personnel who wish to keep treatment confidential from the Department of Defense [DOD]
    - Most VHA Vet Centers are staffed by veterans; treatment is provided in a non hospital environment
    - Vet Centers DO NOT share their treatment records with the DOD

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs has three main subdivisions: 1) Veterans Health Administration [VHA]; 2) Veterans Benefits Administration [VBA]; and, 3) National Cemetery Administration. The media frequently confuses the evidentiary burden and documentation required to receive MST-related disability compensation from VBA with the free MST-related treatment available through VHA, which does not require any documentation of the MST experiences.

<sup>2</sup> [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp)

<sup>3</sup> The only clear bar to treatment is a dishonorable discharge.

<sup>4</sup> To find the nearest Vet Cent: [http://www.va.gov/landing2\\_locations.htm](http://www.va.gov/landing2_locations.htm)