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### Guest Editorial—Introduction to the Special Issue

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## Guest Editorial—Introduction to the Special Issue

Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, and New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) veterans and their families face physical, psychological, behavioral, and reintegration challenges that require a behavioral health workforce trained to intervene with evidence-informed strategies that are militarily relevant and culturally responsive to the military lifestyle. Since 2001, more than 2.5 million American service members have deployed to support these military operations, including an unprecedented number of women, National Guard, and Reservists—many experiencing prolonged separations, deployment stressors, and intense combat (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Most service members returned from deployment and reintegrated into their families, communities, and workplaces successfully (Bonanno et al., 2012), whereas others experienced physical and mental health problems and reintegration difficulties (Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center, 2013; Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006; Hoge et al., 2004; Tanielian, 2009). Historically, the social work profession has been actively engaged in the U.S. commitment to providing quality, evidence-based care to military personnel and veterans at the local, state, and national levels. In the introduction to this special issue on military social work education, we discuss the social work profession's commitment to military social work and provide a brief overview of the scholarship included in this issue.

### OUR PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT TO MILITARY SOCIAL WORK

Social workers have a valuable and distinct role in educating and building a professionally trained military behavioral health workforce, and the provision of evidence-informed services to military personnel, veterans, and their families. Social work scholars are active in developing the military social work evidence base: For example, results of 25 distinct military studies were presented at the most recent conference of the Society for Social Work and Research (A. Smith-Osborne, personal communication, February 24, 2015). Despite this ongoing research, calls to action (Rubin, 2012), and the development of practice standards by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE; 2010) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW; 2012), many social work education programs have not yet developed additional coursework, field placements, research, scholarship, and continuing education seminars in military social work, even in states with large numbers of service members and veterans. Possible reasons include a lack of interaction with the All-Volunteer Force because only about 1% of Americans now serve in the military and a belief that all service members and veterans are entitled to and will seek social work services and health care from the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Administration (VA).

Because military personnel may interact with civilian health care systems and recently returned veterans may seek social services and behavioral health care outside the DoD and VA, a cadre of trained professional social workers is needed in community-based organizations; universities; mental health agencies; courts and penal systems; and state and local departments of mental health, social services, and substance abuse programs. Not all social work students, instructors, and practitioners in military, veteran, and civilian delivery systems need to have military-related

experience to provide quality care, but they should acknowledge the profession's commitment to increasing military-related knowledge and skills and should seek education and training to modify current practice behaviors to address the complex needs of military and veteran populations. The DoD and VA have structured social work field placement models on which we can build our knowledge-generating capacity, link classroom and field education, and identify future needs for military social work education and a skilled military behavioral health workforce. However, preparing students to provide military social work solely through a military, veteran, or civilian delivery system is no longer effective to address the care coordination needs of contemporary military and veteran populations. A more inclusive approach to professional social work education and training is needed. In this special issue, we highlight select exemplars of the social work profession's innovative education and training efforts across practice and community settings.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue in the *Journal of Social Work Education* is a forum for professional and scholarly discourse on military social work education initiatives developed to educate and train social work professionals and students for practice with military personnel, veterans, and their families across the micro–macro continuum. Special emphasis was given to educational and technological trends, innovations, and challenges related to educating the next generation of social workers to provide evidence-based services to a new generation of veterans that incorporate the CSWE's (2010) advanced knowledge and practice behaviors in military social work and NASW's (2012) practice standards. Additional focus was given to university–community and university–military partnerships, collaborations, and initiatives that involve community and military stakeholders. Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and conceptual articles from researchers, educators, and practitioners on military social work education and practice were solicited from the professional social work community.

In this special issue, we highlight select exemplars of the social work profession's unique contributions to military social work education. The issue is divided into two sections: (1) discourse on the integration of military social work into professional social work education and (2) innovative military social work education and training programs for doctoral and master's students, student veterans, and licensed social work professionals—many including program evaluation and other research components. In the following sections, each section is described along with a brief overview of representative articles.

## INTEGRATION OF MILITARY SOCIAL WORK INTO PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Four articles highlight military social work as a field of practice requiring specialized knowledge and skills, teaching strategies based on the CSWE competencies and advanced practice behaviors in military social work, the inclusion of military and veteran culture in social work education curricula, and adapting social work field placements for training in military social work practice. Wooten presents a rationale for military social work as a specialized field of practice, the need for military social work education, and opportunities and challenges for professional social work education. She delineates foundation and

advanced knowledge in military social work and concludes by proposing an integrated model of intellectual capital to guide strategic planning for professional military social work education in addition to professional infrastructure needed to develop intellectual capital in military social work. For social work educators unfamiliar with military and veteran culture, Daley provides examples of teaching strategies based on CSWE's advanced practice behaviors in military social work for integration into social work courses, specifically focusing on their application to CSWE's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS; CSWE, 2008). He identifies foundation and advanced-year military social work educational goals based on EPAS 2.1.1 to 2.1.10 and suggests that the infusion of military social work across the social work curriculum will assist students and faculty in becoming more sensitive to the issues faced by military service members, veterans, and their families.

Continuing the application of CSWE's EPAS (2008) to military social work education, Canfield and Weiss propose the inclusion of military-related material into the foundation courses of undergraduate and graduate social work education because social workers providing services in civilian settings not focused on military-related difficulties may encounter military personnel, veterans, and families who seek services outside of the DoD and VA. Key issues, military examples, and resources are recommended for the integration of military culture into human behavior in the social environment, generalist practice, research methods, and social policy core curricula. With a focus on field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education, Selber, Chavkin, and Biggs advance a promising field instruction model in military social work with the growing student veteran population on American campuses. This innovative approach to field education expands placement opportunities beyond the VA for professional training in service delivery to current and past military cohorts.

## INNOVATIVE MILITARY SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Five articles outline innovative military social work education models, university–community and university–military partnerships, and research methodologies that evaluate their implementation and effectiveness. All include experiential learning opportunities for social work students. Based on a university–military collaboration in Virginia, Weng and colleagues describe a couples' retreat that was a relationship enhancement program for OEF/OIF/OND veterans involved in the Wounded Warrior Program and their relationship partners. The program management, clinical practice, and evaluation research components of the project involved six doctoral and master's social work students. Experiential learning for social work students included group work, skill-building sessions, interviewing, data collection and analysis, manuscript development, and dissemination.

Based on a university–community partnership, Rishel and Hartnett describe the implementation of the Integrated Mental and Behavioral Health Training Program, which focuses on integrated and culturally appropriate models of social service delivery to military personnel, veterans, and their families in rural West Virginia. Emphasizing military social work practice in rural communities, experiential learning for social work students included military-related field placements, specialized training workshops, leadership development, professional mentoring and networking, and employment placement support. Focusing on

service to military-connected children, Garcia, De Pedro, Astor, Lester, and Benbenishty describe the training, implementation, and evaluation of Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS) School-Based Skill-Building Groups (SBGs) conducted by master's-level social work students to promote resilience in children from military families. An adaptation of FOCUS (Lester et al., 2011), a psychological intervention to assist families experiencing military-related stressors and transitions, SBGs were developed as a school-based intervention for military-affiliated children. Experiential learning for social work students included field placements in military-connected public schools that involved SBG training and implementation. Initial results of implementation by master's-level social work interns are reported.

Based on resilience theory and a prevention model, DuMars, Bolton, Maleku, and Smith-Osborne discuss a manualized protocol developed to provide psychoeducation skills, social learning, and cognitive remediation training that included a field placement component and a doctoral research practicum on military social work practice and intervention research, respectively. Experiential learning for social work students included interprofessional training on and implementation of the manualized protocol, dissemination of knowledge to clients, and participation in intervention and translational research. Master's and doctoral programs will find in this military field education and research model a cost-effective exemplar for simultaneously implementing military intervention research, enhancing doctoral research training, and integrating military social work into master's-level field education.

Based on a university–community partnership, Smith-Osborne describes a continuing education initiative and research that evaluates the infusion of military content into postgraduate training for licensed professional social workers and other behavioral health providers. Process outcomes and research findings are promising in demonstrating program implementation and use by civilian and military social workers. This professional continuing education model shows potential for feasible replication by continuing education programs of varying sizes in either resource-rich or resource-limited communities.

Finally, in a Letter to the Editor, McNeil, a VA social worker, shares historical perspectives on the role of the social work profession in serving military retirees and combat veterans who are patients within the U.S. Veterans Health Administration. She concludes with a call to action for the social work profession. VA social workers continuously provide practice knowledge and skills to educate and train social work professionals and students in military social work, and they carry on the profession's tradition of exceptional service to the armed forces. We appreciate VA social workers' service to our profession and our nation.

## CONCLUSION

The social work profession is well-poised for knowledge generation and building workforce capacity in military social work. All social workers have knowledge and skills to contribute to the provision of the best care possible for our nation's service men and women and those who support them. Collectively, the scholarship included in this special issue on military social work education continues to exemplify the social work profession's commitment to military social work, the modification of best practices for military social work education and practice, the development of innovative strategies to serve contemporary military populations, and the

dissemination of empirical evidence to inform future military social work. We appreciate the contributions of our colleagues who chose to disseminate their scholarship in this special issue.

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