



## **PTSD in Asian and Pacific Islanders: Veterans and Families 1 Written Video Transcript**

[00:00.20.00] Thank you for joining us. As you know, our communities are blessed and enriched by our nation's diverse ethnic and indigenous cultures. This program discusses the cultural diversity and family issues [00:00.40.00] among Asian-American and Pacific Islander veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. Our focus is on issues of concern to this population and our purpose is to provide information to those of you who are most connected [00:01.00.00] to our nation's veterans. You will be hearing from veterans about their cultural upbringing, their family traditions and their struggles with PTSD. In addition you'll hear about their personal experiences as soldiers of Asian-American or Pacific Islander [00:01.20.00] ancestry. The individuals interviewed have generously shared their experiences in order to help veterans in their own recovery efforts and for family members who wish to help veteran receiving services through VA. By understanding the unique [00:01.40.00] cultural and military experience of each veteran we increase our awareness of ways to best support their treatment. We hope that you will find this video informative and useful for your own PTSD treatment or with the treatment [00:02.00.00] of your loved ones.

At that time I didn't know what I had PTSD but I could not deal with life on an everyday schedule. [00:02.20.00] I couldn't sleep, had nightmares. I wasn't a very good person to be with.

The (war) memories bothering your sleep or like my case [00:02.40.00] it's the feet that been bothering me. I didn't know anything about post-traumatic stress until my friends are going through that.

It makes you break down and cry. I mean I don't know why. But I used to get [00:03.00.00] that depressive mood where I just wanted to kill myself.

It's tough living with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, but there is hope and there is help. [00:03.20.00] Being diagnosed with PTSD is nothing to be ashamed of. The name, post-traumatic stress disorder, lets us know that doctors have a name for certain groups of symptoms that people commonly experience after suffering or witnessing traumatic events. PTSD cuts across all groups of people and all walks of life and [00:03.40.00] all areas of our country. It's not a sign of weakness. Many veterans of all backgrounds develop PTSD as a result of their traumatic military experiences. In fact PTSD is the third most common problem in our nation's veterans who go for VA services. This program [00:04.00.00] is designed specifically to assist veterans who have PTSD and their families. We want to help you understand PTSD by sharing stories of other Asian-American and Pacific Islander veterans who are getting help for their PTSD. Maybe you'll see a little of yourself in their struggles. We'll also go more [00:04.20.00]



in-depth into the symptoms of PTSD and what you expect in treatment. Now, let's turn to our first veteran. Eighty four year old Jesse Hirata, a Japanese-American veteran, suffered for more than 60 years before he finally realized he had PTSD.

December 7th, [00:04.40.00] 1941, a date which will live in infamy. United States of America.

Actually, Pearl Harbor Day we were through the radio we were ordered to go back to post. But then passing Pearl Harbor (all jammed) [00:05.00.00] so we were stuck right in front of Pearl Harbor where we saw the Zeros diving and the bombers bombing the ships. If you go lower and look through the harbor, the smoke rises so you can see all the ships burning and falling over. Pearl Harbor was a sneak attack. [00:05.20.00] So, although I'm Japanese, but I don't have the feeling like Japan Japanese. We Americans. So naturally we get mad.

As a Japanese-American soldier, Jesse was part of the distinguished 100th Infantry battalion [00:05.40.00] from Hawaii. They were honored with many military service medals for their bravery and courage. Today, Jesse is retired from the military and from his dry-cleaning business. He used to be a tour guide for Pearl Harbor, the site of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial and now the place of the Battleship Missouri Memorial. [00:06.00.00] For years he was troubled at night about his war experience, but it was when he turned 84 that he found out he suffered from PTSD symptoms

Well, I couldn't sleep because if it's hot I can't sleep, if it's cold I can't sleep. So, I didn't think [00:06.20.00] there was anything else except when I sleep my bedding is all upside down, so I'm really tossing around. If the [6:33] is cold you just curl up, but then a friend told me, you better go to the Vet. [00:06.40.00] So, I went to a doctor.

When the pills the doctor prescribed worked on curing his foot pain but not his sleep Jesse walked into the vet center and talked to a counselor about his sleep problems and other troubles.

You'll notice as you start working more and more on some of the things that have been bothering you [00:07.00.00] that your symptoms actually may start finally settling down a little bit more than before you came in.

Of course when you think about post-traumatic stress (they tell me) the things I think about, I dream about (these) post-traumatic stress, it's not my feet [laughs] [00:07.20.00] that (kept) me from sleeping.

Jesse admits that his Japanese upbringing taught him not to divulge private things. Sharing personal problems is considered shameful among Japanese families.

Asian people are reserved, they don't [00:07.40.00] come out and give their feelings. So, really we brought up that way, especially World War II group.



For most Asian-American Pacific Islander cultures the whole sense of mental illness or mental health [00:08.00.00] often carries a negative stigma to it. And so they're not likely to rush to a mental health clinic to seek help. Could be embarrassing, it could be shameful.

Asian-Americans are reserved. They should be more asking questions and then they'll answer, and they won't very seldom come out [00:08.20.00] by themselves explaining things.

Now, Jesse is able to talk to others about his PTSD and to let them know that if they ever find themselves suffering from problems stemming from their military experience that help is available.

So, I encourage them to go to the VA and [00:08.40.00] talk to them about it. They'll listen to you. So, problems can be solved. But you have to say from your side you have to tell them how you feel, what's bothering you. [00:09.00.00] They cannot read your mind.

We're glad you're taking steps to seek help. We know that a significant number of Asian-American and Pacific Islander veterans are not coming in for treatment. There are some common reasons why. See if any of these [00:09.20.00] sound familiar. I'm going crazy. Not talking about these things is better. I'll lose control of my emotions and hurt someone. No one will believe my story. No one will understand what I'm going through. I can't trust the government. Getting help will [00:09.40.00] bring shame on me and my family. No, nothing's wrong with me, I can deal with this myself. My physical problems are just what you get after combat and growing older.

It helps to know, for example, that for some people that they might not express themselves [00:10.00.00] emotionally. They might come out more in a physical sort of way with stomachaches and headaches as opposed to talking about being angry or being sad.

And of course with Hawaiians it also is that they don't separate the psyche from the physical, that it's all in a whole. [00:10.20.00] And if you are angry and if you are frequently angry what will happen is that your liver will be affected.

If left untreated PTSD can have a devastating effect on your body. It's not uncommon for veterans with PTSD [00:10.40.00] to try many different methods to remedy their physical and emotional symptoms. Going to the doctor for assessment, diagnosis and treatment is a common choice. Other options may include more culturally specific healing techniques such as acupuncture, tai chi, herbal remedies or seeking spiritual guidance. [00:11.00.00] There is no one remedy for treating people with PTSD, so a combination of treatments that best suits your needs and beliefs is something that you and your VA care provider can figure out together.



It's confusing when you have PTSD. You may think that you're going crazy but you're not. The symptoms [00:11.20.00] of PTSD is a response by your body and your brain to overwhelming pressure and stress. this can happen to anyone, even the strongest person.

Many families have heard those old stories about World War II veterans about Uncle Joe who's a little strange, who doesn't want to have contact with everybody, he's somewhat abrasive and all that. So, now we see [00:11.40.00] that sort of same thing with some veterans like from Vietnam. And not just Vietnam, we're seeing that with veterans from other military peacekeeping missions, as an example.

What are the symptoms of PTSD? How can you be sure you have it? Well, to be given a diagnosis [00:12.00.00] of PTSD the therapist determines several things about a client. PTSD requires a history of exposure to or witnessing of a traumatic event. The experience of symptoms can bring on unwelcome memories, avoidance of people and places or activities since the trauma. Also, [00:12.20.00] PTSD includes having problems with becoming easily startled with a constant wariness of your surroundings for potential danger. In other words, as a veteran you may have witnessed something life threatening in combat, you experienced serious physical injury to yourself or others and your response at the time [00:12.40.00] was one of intense fear, horror, or helplessness. Such exposure to trauma often leads to some well known symptoms. Dr. Lee explains the group of symptoms in more detail.

The first group has to do with intrusive, recurring reliving of a trauma. For instance, [00:13.00.00] intrusive memories of the traumatic event or repeated dreams of the trauma. The second group has to do with avoiding reminders of the trauma, for instance avoiding conversation, thoughts, feelings that have to do with the trauma, avoiding situations [00:13.20.00] or places that may remind them of the trauma. Finally, the third category has to do with symptoms of increased arousal, for instance problems falling asleep, staying asleep, problems concentrating, excessive startle. And these symptoms need to [00:13.40.00] occur for at least a month following the event.

One choice that some veterans suffering from PTSD make is to numb the emotional pain and uncontrollable memories by using alcohol or drugs. This often leads to more problems. Some veterans become violent, running into trouble with the law [00:14.00.00] and ending up in jail. Other trauma survivors totally avoid people and crowds for fear of losing control.

The problem is that after a while when the symptoms persist, instead of helping you it gets in the way. You're no longer living your life. You're just living your trauma again and again. But if you seek treatment, [00:14.20.00] you take your medications, you make the lifestyle changes, you can live a pretty good life.

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