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CranioSacral Therapy Post Traumatic Stress: Helping Veterans With Dr. John E. Upledger's Legacy

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Dr. John E. Upledger, founder of the Upledger Institute International, expressed a love and respect for veterans that was legendary. To help with the effects of combat, Dr. Upledger developed week-long CranioSacral Therapy (CST) programs designed specifically for veterans. Given that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has now determined there are approximately 20 veteran suicides per day, finding and practicing effective therapies is crucial.

The Veteran's Program

SOCIAL MEDIA



This past November, in honor of Veteran's Day, the *Dr. John E. Upledger Foundation* sponsored another week-long therapy program to help both men and women who served in the various U.S. military branches. The eight participants, ranging in age from 33 to 83 all reported suffering emotional and/or physical trauma to their heads and bodies during their service. Since the onset of their disorders and injuries, all had sought a variety of both conventional and complimentary treatments.

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This most recent program, led by the Upledger Institute's medical director, consisted of a 23-member, multi-disciplinary therapist team comprised of psychotherapists, chiropractors, and occupational, physical, CranioSacral and massage therapists who utilized CranioSacral Therapy and other healing modalities aimed at helping the body heal.

The treatment program included pre and post testing evaluations to support CranioSacral Therapy's effectiveness for treating PTSD symptoms such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, pain interference and quality of life. All of the veterans participated in daily four-hour sessions for a total of 20 hours of hands-on multiple therapy sessions. Group sessions held daily helped facilitate each client's healing process.

At post-testing, veterans reported improvements in their symptoms. At the time of this writing, final clinical data had not been received for this program, however, preliminary data is encouraging and appears to show improvements in areas such as

preliminary data is encouraging and appears to show improvements in areas such as social function, anxiety, depression, fatigue and pain interference.

Nancy's Account

Throughout the years I have had the honor of being a team leader for various programs, and when I received the call to be a part of this veteran's program, I was happy to join my colleagues and help the veterans. Each day, a team of therapists was assigned to work with a veteran. Every day the teams rotated. This not only encouraged trust, but also allowed the veterans to experience and benefit from the different skills of a variety of therapists.

I was amazed how the veterans climbed onto the tables regardless of how uneasy or skeptical they felt. CST works to relieve emotions from the body as well as physical pain through somatic emotional release. This is a therapeutic process that helps rid the mind and body of residual past trauma associated with negative experiences, and this can be a tough road for some who've witnessed or experienced intense trauma.

Often times, the release triggers recall and the "going back to go forward" can be scary and very emotional. However, I experienced that in the midst of the darkest moment there would be laughter, a ray of light, a new perspective, and the dissipation of physical/emotional restrictions: health returning.

Survivor's Guilt

A common theme we heard from the veterans was that those who "come home in boxes" or did not return are the real heroes. Those that survive often have survivor's guilt. However, it seems to me a far more difficult assignment is carried by the men and women who return. Finding purpose and honoring their fallen brothers and sisters by living a productive life and assisting their fellow veterans who are suffering is also heroic work.

Discretion and loyalty are two very important qualities to these veterans. Over and over, we heard that they would do anything for "my brothers and sisters" and they meant it. And, some are bound to never discuss sensitive information. Because of this, our job included how to support and trust that the part of them that brought them to our tables would find other pathways to health. Dr. Upledger called this, the body's ability to heal itself, "The Inner Physician."

On the last day, we gathered in a circle to bring closure to the week. Veterans who initially had been guarded and closed were moving around the room differently; smiling with hope and a greater purpose, and with a freedom in their step. They spoke in wonderment over how differently they felt from the first day to the last. Words like "remarkable" and "life saving" were exchanged.

Therapists spoke with gratitude about the privilege of being able to bear witness to such courage and transformation. This process not only profoundly affected those on the table, but the therapists, as well.

Showing Gratitude

On that last day, a colleague put his arm around me, drew me close and we sat together listening, as tears were streaming down our faces, our hearts nearly bursting. Then one of the veterans stood up and saluted us therapists. We gasped. No greater compliment or respect could be given. Such a simple gesture, given so earnestly, sent our hearts far beyond what we thought was even imaginable. We became of the same heart in that circle.

Finally, as if there were not enough miracles opening that day, we were told that the VA had called a little earlier about the pending approval of VA alternative healing programs. This is a huge opportunity for more veterans to receive treatment options that will address PTSD — another of Dr. John's dreams coming true.

Dr. Upledger's vision was to make CST available to all veterans through the VA. In military language, CST helps the body learn/relearn how to "stand down" and finally rest. To this day, Upledger Institute International continues to gather data from each program verifying the effectiveness of CST when treating the symptoms of PTSD, concussions, and chronic pain. I am honored to be part of this legacy and journey of healing for veterans.

For more information about the program please visit upledger.org.

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