

Participatory Research Fund Project Exploring the Needs of Armed Forces Veterans with Chronic Pain

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Overview:

The 2021 census asked the England and Wales population if they had served in the UK military. The results show that there are 1.85 million veterans in England and Wales. However, there is no accurate data which details the prevalence of chronic pain among the veteran population with estimates suggesting a range from 30-80% (Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2012., Hitch et al, 2020) Whilst armed forces veterans are civilians, research conducted by the VFI has identified that the way in which veterans live with and manage their pain is influenced by the unique socio-cultural sphere of their armed forces experience (Cooper et al, 2017., Engward et al, 2018., Kersey, 2023). This makes them an interesting and important population to engage with.

Aim and objectives:

- To identify key issues for veterans living with chronic pain to understand what is important to them in terms of living with chronic pain as a veteran in the UK.
- Identify any regional issues which affect access to veteran specific services and chronic pain care.
- Create an experts by experience group to help inform future research projects on chronic pain.
- Use findings from focus groups to co-write research bids with Experts by Experience.

Funding of £10,000 was used for:

- Researchers travel to focus groups.
- Reimbursement of participants travel expenses.
- A 'thankyou' gift card for each participant
- Dissemination activities.
- Printing flyers/poster for focus groups.



Stakeholders involved:

- Living Options Devon
- Blesma: The Limbless Veterans
- The Royal Irish Regiment Benevolent Fund
- Royal Irish Regimental Welfare Officer
- The Green Howards Museum
- Help For Heroes
- Erskine Hospital

Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement elements:

We used veteran consultants taken from a pool of veterans from previous studies who had consented to be contacted about further research undertaken by the lead researcher. The veteran consultants, consulted on how best to hold focus groups to ensure they worked for attendees. This included, identifying suitable areas in: Glasgow, Belfast, Exeter, Richmond and Cardiff, the best time of day and day of the week told the focus groups. Veteran consultants also helped with recruitment, advertising the project across their own networks.

Research outcomes:

- Emerging key themes from the focus groups include; Issues with compensation and benefits, the effect of pain on family, the medication tightrope and access to services. These will be used to inform future research.
- A report and infographics will be produced detailing the findings of the focus groups.
- Form a panel of experts by experience who will be used to inform and guide NIHR research proposal writing and subsequent research projects.

Do you want to know more or be involved?

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