

PTSD: You don't have to be a veteran

By Sam Ali, Fidelity Central Senior Associate Editor 6/29/2018

With the July 4th holiday right around the corner, our thoughts naturally turn to BBQs, hanging out with family and friends, and making sure we catch a spectacular fireworks display at night.



But Dr. Kathleen Chard, the Director of the Trauma Recovery Center at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center and Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Cincinnati, wants us to keep something else in mind as well: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

While our country often celebrates the service of the many men and women who served in the military, what we don't hear enough about, especially in the workplace, is the toll that the military and events surrounding combat takes on our vets.

Dr. Chard said that sudden and loud noises associated with fireworks, the bright flashes, and the smell of gunpowder can trigger episodes of PTSD, bringing veterans back to traumatic experiences they have lived through during their service.

Members of the [FiVE](#) and [Enable](#) employee resource groups recently invited Dr. Chard to talk to associates about PTSD, a psychiatric disorder that can occur following a life-threatening event such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or physical or sexual assault in adult or childhood.

Dr. Chard pointed out that while PTSD is most often associated with vets, the military population only represents a segment of those who suffer from the disorder. About 8 or 9 out of every 100 people (or 8-9% of the population) will have PTSD at some point in their lives.

She said PTSD develops after a terrifying ordeal that involves physical harm or the threat of physical harm. While it's normal for the mind and body to be in shock after a terrifying event, this normal response becomes PTSD when our nervous system gets "stuck," she said.

Dr. Chard said that for some, symptoms might include recurrent, intrusive reminders of the traumatic event, including distressing thoughts, nightmares, and flashbacks where you feel like it's happening again. This then prompts the individual to have extreme avoidance of things that remind him of the traumatic event, including people, places, thoughts, or situations you associate with the bad memories.

It is very common for a person affected by PTSD to withdraw from friends and family and lose interest in everyday activities, including work, she said. However, the good news is that with ongoing and consistent therapy a person can regain his mental wellness and balance, she said.

She reminded associates, that as we celebrate our troops, whether it's on a holiday such as July 4th, Memorial Day, or Veterans Day, to also remember that some people may be suffering in silence and could use our help and support.

To learn more about PTSD, Dr. Chard encouraged associates to visit the [National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#).

If you missed the [FiVE](#) and [Enable](#) PTSD talk with Dr. Chard, [you can view it here](#).