

Brief on the forthcoming NHS veterans' mental health complex treatment service

September 2017

Background

NHS England is in the process of procuring a veterans' mental health complex treatment service (VMH CTS) that will launch on 1 April 2018.

The purpose of the VMH CTS, which builds on the recent launch of the [NHS veterans' mental health transition, liaison and intervention service](#) (VMH TIL service), is to provide an enhanced service for veterans who have military attributable complex mental health problems, many of whom will have experienced trauma, which have not been resolved earlier in the care/support pathway.

The service will focus on veterans who will benefit from the intensive provision of a range of mental health and social interventions. This may include (but is not limited to) substance misuse, occupational therapy, physical health, employment, accommodation, relationships, finances and trauma focused therapy.

The VMH CTS will replace NHS funded residential services provided by Combat Stress, which provides treatment for veterans with medium to severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who are clinically stable. Successful bidders will be appointed in December 2017 to allow time for mobilising and establishing the new service.

The VMH CTS is an important part of NHS England's obligation to uphold the health commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant and deliver the ambitions set out in [The Five Year Forward View For Mental Health](#). It is also a key element of our partnership agreement with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and our ongoing work to support armed forces charities and NHS services to work together to provide a full range of services from transition to intensive treatment interventions and above all commission person centred care.

Why we are procuring a new service

It is a legal duty that all NHS services are reviewed and tendered for. With the contracting round due for the service currently provided by Combat Stress, this provides a timely opportunity to review current provision and determine whether any changes or improvements are required to help ensure the right care and treatment are provided. We have therefore undertaken a detailed review to help inform arrangements for this new service. This has involved looking at feedback and patient outcomes from the Combat Stress service; talking to veterans who have used the current service, as well as their families, armed forces charities, mental health clinicians and the MOD; reviewing research and evidence, such as the [NHS veterans' mental health services engagement report](#) and [Gate to Gate: Improving the mental health and criminal justice care pathways](#)

[for veterans and family members report](#); and looking at the needs of the veteran population across the country.

Whilst outcomes for those veterans who have completed the Combat Stress residential treatment programme are generally positive, there are a number of factors which have prevented a larger cohort of veterans with mental health needs from benefitting from the programme. The review identified evidence which showed an increased number of veterans who have a wider range of needs would benefit from a community based service. In line with this, findings also showed that people want a more local service with increased capacity that offers a broader range of services that are intensive, proactive and responsive and provide prompt care and treatment that is sensitive to the culture of the armed forces.

Furthermore, findings highlighted the importance of providing integrated support with managing alcohol and substance misuse, anger issues and repeat offending. In addition, families and spouses want to be more involved in the care and treatment of their loved ones and would like advice and information on receiving help and support for themselves.

Provision of the new service

The VMH CTS is being commissioned across the following four regions to ensure access to treatment and care across England:

- South West England (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and the South West of England)
- South East England and London
- Midlands and East of England
- North of England.

The service will be provided in a range of community settings across England, rather than a residential setting, to accommodate the provision of individual or group interventions and where appropriate, allow the individual to continue work. Treatment and interventions will normally be provided in a series of sessions for a period of up to 32 weeks and in environments conducive to the effective delivery of care.

Providers will be expected to work in collaboration with the wider NHS, statutory bodies, local authorities and the third sector, including armed forces charities, to ensure holistic support is provided for patients and their families. This means having arrangements in place with other organisations, especially those who provide crisis and in-patient care, to ensure that care is seamless and immediate action is taken on clinical needs and risks.

Advising on and guiding inpatient care, including crisis care, will be an important element of the new service, with providers expected to produce crisis plans with the veteran, their family and other healthcare organisations. They will also be expected to have a flexible approach to delivery in order to best meet the needs of those veterans who have complex needs and / or higher risks.

The single point of referral to the VMH CTS will be from the VMH TIL service. This will ensure that the veteran's military service has been confirmed and any interventions earlier in the pathway have been considered.

What is currently commissioned?

Combat Stress is currently commissioned by NHS England to provide an intensive treatment programme. This is a continuous six week residential programme for veterans with medium to severe PTSD who are clinically stable. As such, the NHS funded Combat Stress service does not provide acute beds or accept patients who would require that level of care. Treatment is provided in three locations, which are Tyrwhitt House, Surrey, Audley Court, Shropshire and Hollybush House, Scotland.

As the new service is being tendered as a single stage open procurement, Combat Stress, along with other interested organisations, can submit a bid, should this fit their future ambitions and priorities.

For further information, please email england.south-armedforces@nhs.net