



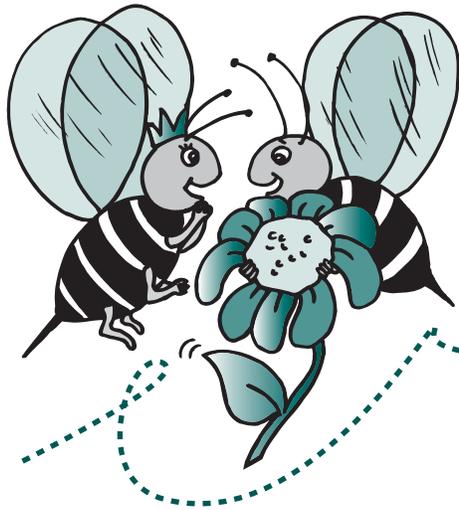
Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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Re-Energizing your Marriage

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(Married for 23 years)

You and your spouse wake up early, and the day goes by in a blur: get the kids ready for school, job pressures, dinner, bills to pay. Next thing you know it's late at night, time to go to sleep, and the two of you have hardly talked. Days turn into weeks, weeks to months, months to years: the calendar pages seem to fly off the wall.



Little problems turn into big arguments. Your spouse looks sad, and you say something like "That's not a problem, you should hear what happened to me today." After a while, it feels like you never see each other

even though you are living in the same place.

Sound familiar? In today's fast paced lifestyle, it's no wonder that the divorce rate remains stubbornly high. Add the special pressures of military life and deployment and it's also no wonder that the divorce rate for military personnel is rising.

Hopeless? Not necessarily. According to the book, "Fighting for your Marriage," it's normal for married couples to have problems and conflict. *But* how a couple handles their problems can prevent a marriage from turning into a divorce. Couples need to handle their problems as a team and realize that quick fixes aren't always the best solutions.

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Signs that a marriage might be headed for problems:

- Invalidation – for example, the response to a spouse’s complaint is “That’s not a problem, you should hear what happened to me today.”
- Negative Interpretations – one spouse makes a snippy comment and he or she seems like a monster to the other spouse.
- Escalation – little problems turn into big arguments.
- Avoidance/Withdrawal – spouses don’t talk or spend time together.

The key to getting through these “rough patches” is to nurture your marriage. Realize that you and your spouse have different ways of looking at life and respect each other’s point of view. Each partner should take responsibility for understanding their own issues and then communicating in a clear and respectful way.

One way to do this is with a simple “X, Y, Z” formula: “When you said/did (“x”) today (“y”), I felt (“z”).



For example, “When you told Pat today that I’m getting paunchy, I felt hurt (or sad, or scared, or irritated).” Focus on your feelings, not on your partner’s feelings. Stick to one or two simple sentences.

Let your spouse respond. Then repeat back in your own words what was said. A good response might be “If I hear you correctly, when I said to Pat that you were getting a paunch, you felt hurt.” Now your spouse speaks in the “x,y,z” format and you paraphrase. You take turns until you both believe the issue is well understood.

Talking like this may seem awkward at first. But with commitment and practice, it should seem easier over time. You can even try this with friends.

Realistically, some days nothing works and your discussion with your spouse escalates. In this case, either one of you can call a “Time-Out” where you delay the discussion for an hour or so, up to a day. Remember, whoever calls the Time-Out has the responsibility for suggesting a time to get back together and both partners need to agree. When you get back together try the Speaker-Listener format again.

It’s also important to find things that will help your marriage deepen and grow. One area that couples often neglect is just having fun with each other. Make the time and schedule something that both you and your spouse will enjoy. And then do it. Agree that the two of you will keep

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this as a fun event; no problem solving. Also, talk like friends. Take the time to just listen and “be” with your spouse.

Many couples can benefit from the marriage educational programs available in your community. However, if problems are too big, if one partner just won’t participate, or if there is abuse in the relationship, then professional counseling may be necessary.

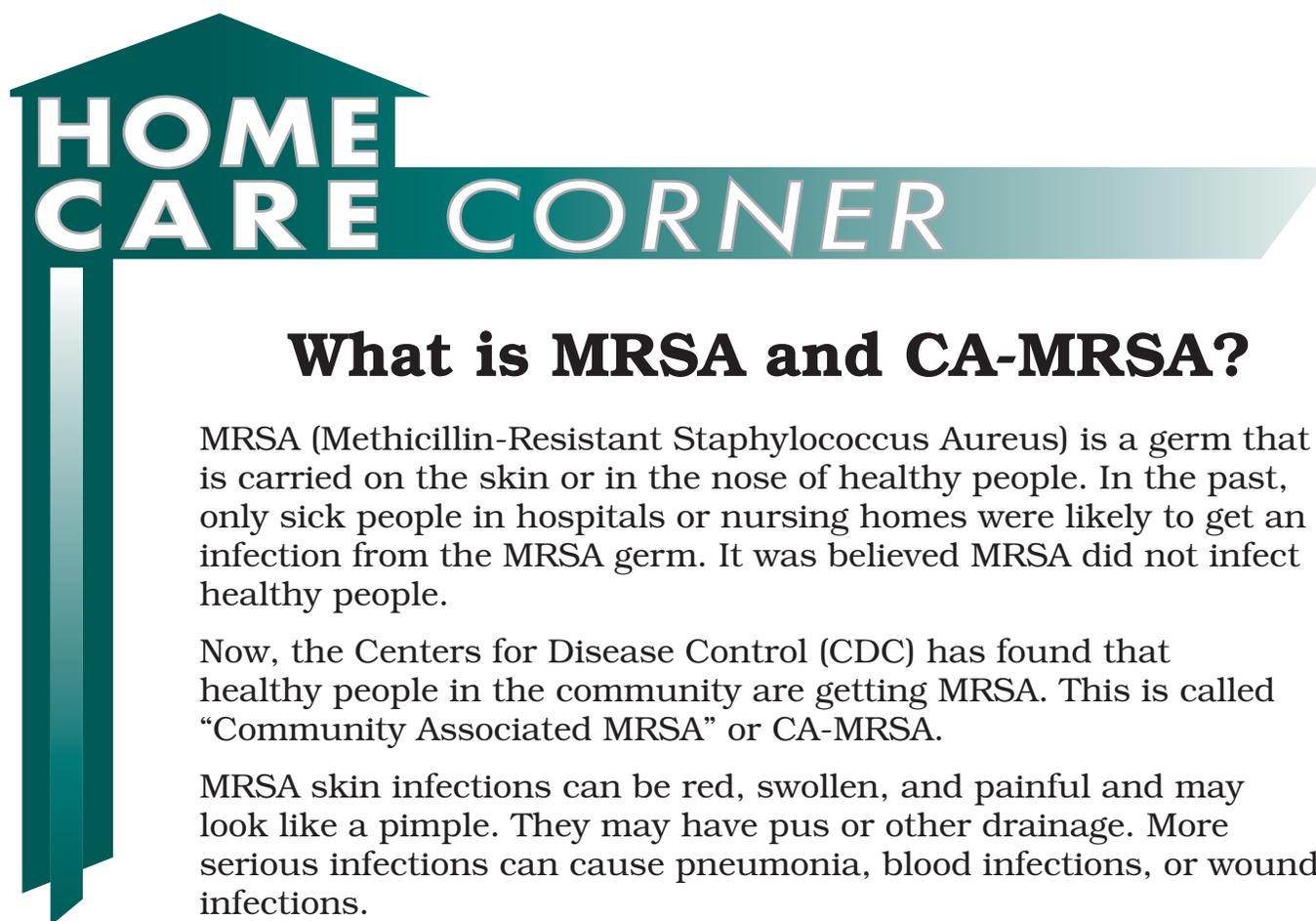
If you are having problems, talk to

your health care team about whether counseling may be right for you. And have a rewarding and fulfilling marriage.

Sources:

Markman, H., Stanley, S., and Blumberg, S.L..
Fighting For Your Marriage (1994). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

“Soldiers Divorce Rates Up,” USA Today, June 08, 2005, in Military Headlines, Military.Com The Early Brief.

A graphic for 'Home Care Corner' featuring a teal house-shaped header with the text 'HOME CARE CORNER' in white. Below the header is a teal vertical bar on the left and a teal horizontal bar on the right. The main content area is white with a teal border on the left.

HOME CARE CORNER

What is MRSA and CA-MRSA?

MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) is a germ that is carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. In the past, only sick people in hospitals or nursing homes were likely to get an infection from the MRSA germ. It was believed MRSA did not infect healthy people.

Now, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has found that healthy people in the community are getting MRSA. This is called “Community Associated MRSA” or CA-MRSA.

MRSA skin infections can be red, swollen, and painful and may look like a pimple. They may have pus or other drainage. More serious infections can cause pneumonia, blood infections, or wound infections.

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Who can get CA-MRSA?

CA-MRSA has been found among military recruits, athletes, children, and prisoners. But anyone could get it. MRSA skin infections are spread by:

- ✓ Close skin-to-skin contact
- ✓ Openings in the skin
- ✓ Contaminated items and surfaces
- ✓ Crowded living conditions
- ✓ Poor hygiene

How can I prevent the spread of CA-MRSA?

- ✓ Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- ✓ Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- ✓ Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- ✓ Don't share personal items such as towels and razors.
- ✓ Wipe surfaces or equipment in gyms before and after use.
- ✓ Use a barrier (i.e. towel or clothing) between your skin and shared equipment when working out.

Is CA-MRSA treatable?

Yes! Most infections are treatable with antibiotics. Remember to take all of the antibiotic, even if the infection is getting better. If an infection is not getting better after a few days, contact your provider. If others you know or live with get the same infection, tell them to go to their provider for care.

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References:

Issues in Healthcare Settings: CA-MRSA Information for the Public. (April 2005). Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion (DHQP).

Living with MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus). (Fall, 2004). Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.

Be a Partner in Your Healthcare



- **Educate yourself** about your diagnosis and tests you are going to have. Check out dependable websites and library resources. If you are having tests, always follow up and get the results.
- **Speak up** if you have questions or concerns. Don't be afraid or embarrassed. If you don't understand, ask again
- **Identify yourself.** Don't hesitate to correct a health care person if you think they have you confused with someone else. They should check your name and social security number before they give you medicine, take you for a procedure, or move you to another area.
- **Surgery is the time for special precautions.** Be sure you understand what procedure you are going to have. The surgeon should mark your body where you are going to be operated on. If you want to be extra careful, YOU mark the area to be operated on!
- **Ask someone you trust to be your advocate.** They will be less stressed and able to "hear" the provider better. They may think of questions you did not.
- **Pay special attention to your medicine.** You should know the name of your medicines, how much to take and how often to take it.

This applies to IV medicines (given in a vein) also. Ask the nurse what you are getting and how long it should take. If the fluid seems to be going too fast or slow, tell your nurse.

Finish all your medicine unless your doctor tells you to stop. Never share your medicine with others, even in your own family.

If the doctor gives you a prescription that you can't read, the pharmacist might not be able to either. Ask for clarification.

Tell your provider about all the pills you take, including vitamins and herbals. Carry a list of your medicines with you. It's easier than trying to remember what you take.
- **Falls can kill.** Falling is common for patients who take medicines that affect their balance. Medicine that makes you urinate more often can also put you at risk for falling. Before you take any medicine,

ask about the side effects. If you feel like you are losing your balance, try to ease yourself to the floor using the wall. Be careful when walking outside. Make your home safe. Don't use throw rugs. Fix uneven surfaces. Keep areas well lighted. Get rid of unstable chairs and tables.

■ **Wash those hands!**

Hand washing is the most effective way to stop the spread of infections.



All providers should wash their hands, or use an alcohol gel, before and after the care of every patient. It is OK to ask a provider if they have washed their hands.

Other ways to stop the spread of infections:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your hand when you sneeze or cough.
- Wash your hands after sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose.
- Stay away from others when you are sick or when they are sick.

■ **Smoking and oxygen don't mix.** If you are on oxygen, do not smoke or be near someone who is smoking. Oxygen can start a fire and in seconds you can be severely burned.

■ **Honesty is the best policy.** Always be truthful with your providers. If you smoke three packs of cigarettes a day, tell them. Don't fudge about your weight, what pills you take, or if you drink. Providers can only help if they know what is happening with you.

You and your provider should be partners in your health. By being active in your care, you can help prevent medical errors from happening.

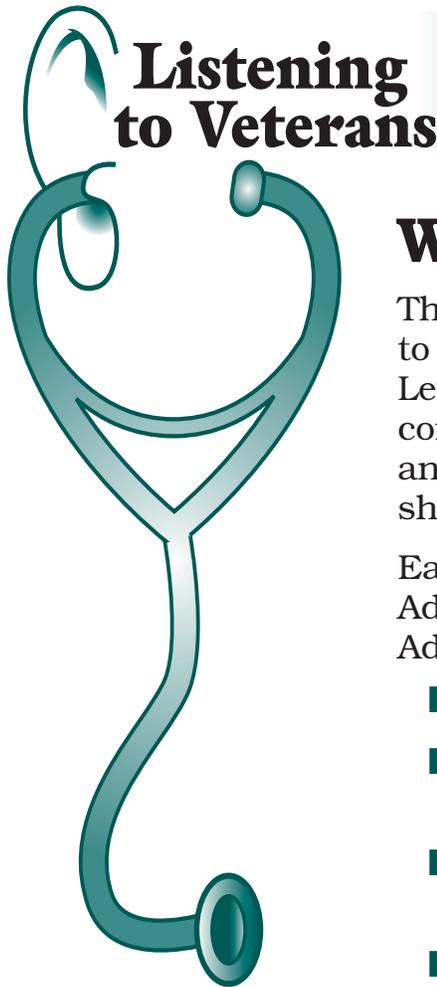


Patricia Tydell, RN, MSN, MPH
Patient Safety Officer
North Chicago VA Medical Center

References:

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations website, <http://www.jcaho.org>.

VA National Center for Patient Safety website, <http://www.patientsafety.gov>



What is a Patient Advocate?

The Patient Advocacy Program is an important tool to help the VA provide world-class customer service. Let your Patient Advocate know about both your complaints and compliments. Complaints are resolved and used to improve care to veterans. Compliments are shared with the staff involved or with the entire facility.

Each facility has a Patient Advocate. The Patient Advocate's job is to help veterans. Some of the Patient Advocates' duties are to:

- Help resolve veteran and/or family complaints.
- Help the veteran understand his/her rights and responsibilities.
- Represent the veteran when following up with health care concerns.
- Act as a go-between on behalf of the veteran when needed.
- Provide information to hospital leaders that will help improve health care at the VA.

Whenever you have questions or needs that are not being taken care of by your health care team, you can call the Patient Advocate. We are here to help you.

Answered by:
Karen Brodlo RN, BSN
Patient Advocate
North Chicago VA
Medical Center

Source:
Patient Advocacy Program.
(2000). VHA Directive
1050.2. Department of
Veterans Affairs, Veterans
Health Administration.

Facility	Patient Advocate	Phone Number	Ext.
Hines	Thomas M. Grego	708-202-2716	-
Iron Mountain	Maryanne Gibler	906-774-3300	32020
Jesse Brown	Betty Featherstone	312-569-6146	-
Madison	Susan Belopavlovich	608-256-1901	17182
Milwaukee	Vern Forman	414-384-2000	42604
North Chicago	Karen Brodlo	224-610-3829	-
Tomah	Deb Mulrain	608-372-3971	66353

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Important note: We are not able to **mail** this newsletter to you. It can be found in waiting rooms of your VA Medical Center and outpatient clinics.

You can also subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter through the VISN 12 internet site at <http://www.visn12.med.va.gov>

Click on the *Services for Veterans* button, then click on the *Veterans' Wellness* section.



Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.

Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals

Hines: 708-202-8387
Iron Mountain: 906-774-3300
Madison: 608-256-1901
Milwaukee: 1-888-469-6614
North Chicago: 1-800-393-0865
Tomah: 1-800-872-8662
Jesse Brown: 312-569-8387

**“Ask An Expert” Question
or Idea for Future Articles**

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

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VISN 12 VA Healthcare facilities are accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). JCAHO evaluates healthcare facilities on quality, safety of patient care and safety of the environment

If you have any concerns about patient care or safety in your facility, first contact the person in charge. If your concern cannot be resolved, the VA encourages you to contact JCAHO. You may request a “public information interview.” Requests should be made in writing to:

Division of Accreditation Operations
Office of Quality Monitoring
Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
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Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181