

military and when they return home, but she has experienced it too many times to deny. In search of the support of the veteran community, she decided to pay her dues (\$1,000) and become a lifetime member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). One night, she showed up to Eugene's VFW post at the Veterans Memorial building (aka Mac's at the Vets Club) on Willamette Street for a member meeting. She was the only woman. "There were 15 men and they all just looked at me. It was a boy's club," she says, grimacing. She sat in the back row until the end of the meeting when she decided to ask about the hats some of the veterans were wearing. "They told me the hats were reserved for soldiers who had

experienced combat," says Ramirez, who did experience combat as a convoy driver. The group then directed Ramirez to the Ladies Auxiliary VFW, a group for wives and female family members of veterans. Insulted and out of viable options, Ramirez gave up her search for a female-friendly veteran community and now pays out-of-pocket to see a non-VA-affiliated therapist once a week. "She's my angel," she says of her therapist.

But Fry and Anderson point out that there may be some relief for Ramirez soon, at least financially. The task force proposed 12 recommendations to the Oregon Legislature. The Oregon Senate studied these recommendations and unanimously

passed a bill this spring "urging Congress to mandate the United States Department of Veterans pay for an MST treatment, even if it is provided outside of VA facilities."

Although Ramirez does not consider herself an MST survivor, perhaps this sets the precedent for veterans struggling with PTSD as well.

No Eugene clinic for women vets?

"I would love to see our soldiers being cared for where they live — reimbursed at the local level," Sen. Anderson says in a phone interview. The obstacle, however, is that most veterans do not live in Portland or Roseburg, home of the only full service

VA facilities in the state. Veterans like Ramirez are tired of the 90-minute drive to Roseburg to get check-ups.

Another problem the report identifies is the lack of mental health care professionals available outside of the VA who specialize in the treatment of MST survivors and PTSD. One recommendation suggests dispatching mobile health care buses to rural areas, but that will not provide the long-term care that the VA's model of evidence-based therapy often requires, specifically cognitive processing theory and prolonged exposure therapy. The task force also emphasizes the necessity of in-patient facilities, which would not be possible with a bus. Anderson would love to see a women veterans clinic in Eugene, just like in Portland. "We just don't know if there is going to be money. It's been a very slow process this time," she says. The 2011 Oregon Legislative session adjourns at the end of June. "We will know then," Anderson says.

The report also finds that there are no protected funds for women veterans within the VA budget. The task force recommends requiring the Veterans Health Administration to fully fund the women veteran's health care initiatives and mandates. By fall VA officials expect to know where the new \$40 million veterans primary health care clinic will be located, *The Register-Guard* reported. There was no mention of allocating funds specifically to women veterans' health care. However, VA Women Veterans Program Manager Marcia Hall says that a section of the new clinic is being designed with women veterans' health care in mind. "The idea that there is a different structure that is required to provide the services for women's health care is not part of the VA history," Hall says. "We're changing that." The female designated area of the clinic will be housed in the same building as the male designated area and there will be no in-patient beds available. There is also the question of finding enough specialized mental health care workers to fill an expected staff of 200. "Do we have room to grow and improve?" Hall asks. "Absolutely."

"There are a lot of women who want to be heard," she says, inching forward in her desk chair. "If more people speak up maybe they will put a little more money into prevention programs, and maybe they will put more money into treating veterans."

Whatever happens, Fry is determined to keep developing programs and building an MST awareness campaign. Last April, Fry and Hall performed the "MST Monologues," a military version of the "Vagina Monologues." They dressed up as veterans from World War II, Vietnam, post-Vietnam, and Iraq and Afghanistan. Fry has also started a reference library for veterans in her office. Soon she will get a recliner where clients can meditate. She plans to continue the T-shirt project (also known as the Clothesline Project), which has proved successful across the nation. But she realizes it is not enough. "Women are still not getting the services that they need. Yes, we're in transition, but when do women start getting valued as veterans?" she says. "Do we have to wait until the next war?"

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