

## Presentation 11 – Helena Chandler

### Internet Disclosure Treatment for Multisymptom Illness

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### Background & Rationale

- Epidemiologic studies report that Gulf War Illness (GWI) criteria are met in 45% to 60% of military personnel returning from combat. (Fukuda et al, 1998, Baker et al, 1997, Wolfe et al, 2002)
- Patients with GWI may consume a disproportionate share of medical resources by virtue of their over-reliance on diagnostic testing and desire for palliative care. (Reid et al, 2002)
- With the recent deployment of troops to Iraq, an influx of veterans with unexplained symptoms may overwhelm the VA healthcare system.

### Background & Rationale (cont'd)

- Written emotional disclosure (ED) reduces healthcare utilization in both healthy and medically ill individuals. (Greenberg et al., 1996; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker et al., 1988; Tojok et al., 2003)
- No research has directly addressed the question of whether written ED delivered on-line can reduce the use of medical services in veterans with GWI
- No studies have attempted to identify the mediators of reduced utilization following ED.

### Primary Aims

- 1) Conduct a randomized controlled trial that evaluates whether a written emotional disclosure intervention delivered via the Internet reduces health care utilization in veterans with GWI
- 2) Determine a possible mechanism (symptom attribution) underlying the efficacy of emotional disclosure

### Experimental Plan

- Veterans will be randomly assigned to On-Line ED + WRIISC Care (N=65) or WRIISC Care Only (N=65)
- Both groups will receive assessment at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months
  - Utilization (chart review), symptom checklist, functional health status, illness attribution, satisfaction care, etc.
- On-Line ED group will receive three e-mails across 3 weeks with instructions to write about the most stressful event that they have experienced. (Pennebaker, 1982)

### Implications

- If effective, On-Line ED provides an efficient and easily accessible treatment for geographically dispersed veterans with GWI.
- Potential treatment benefits include reduced overutilization of healthcare services, increased quality of life, and patient satisfaction.