

# THE Hearing Journal

THE MOST RESPECTED PUBLICATION IN HEARING HEALTH CARE

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## Trade Talk Questionnaire

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**Brief bio:** Sean is a retired Master Sergeant who spent his twenty-year military career as a combat correspondent for the US Air Force and Defense Department. His time in uniform took him from Desert Storm operations in the first Gulf War to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Now he works with Heroes With Hearing Loss® striving to provide effective solutions to Veterans who experience hearing loss among other related injuries.

## Article Title: Treating Veteran Patients: The unique challenges of serving

### **Hearing loss statistics are pretty consistent across all demographics, so what separates veterans with hearing loss from others who face the same challenges?**

Every patient certainly has a unique story and veterans are no different. However, a veteran's experience with hearing loss may be a bit more colorful and complicated than that of your typical patient. For many who have worn our nation's uniform (particularly those who have served in combat), hearing loss is very often intertwined with other comorbidities that can be often overlooked.

Things like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and other physical combat-related injuries can make treating a veteran's hearing loss a complicated process for hearing healthcare providers.

### **How does your program address this unique aspect of treating veterans?**

First, the Heroes With Hearing Loss® program raises awareness by creating a conversation among veterans, their family members and hearing healthcare professionals. This allows everyone in the veteran's life, including the veteran, to better understand the unique obstacles veterans with hearing loss are up against. In short, we want to make sure that treatment for veterans with hearing loss is holistic and includes consideration of any other comorbidities.

We also want healthcare providers and others to realize there are behavioral differences among veterans as well. The unique training, lifestyle and mentality that veterans have can make their hearing loss journey difficult to navigate. Particularly since veterans are often hesitant to talk about their time in service. In fact, we've found that in more than a handful of cases, hearing healthcare providers may not ever realize that their patients are veterans and may have these differences.

### **What are the most common comorbidities that veterans face along with hearing loss?**

Well, it can certainly vary. According to a recent Department of Veterans Affairs benefits study, nearly 60 percent of disabled veterans with higher disability ratings have more than one disability. The average number of different service connected disabilities reported by Gulf War era veterans is six. That's an incredibly high number. Simply put, there's almost always a lot more going on with your veteran patients than meets the eye – or ear, as the case may be.

The top comorbidities to consider are PTSD and traumatic brain injuries. For a lot of veterans with hearing loss or tinnitus, overcoming those injuries also means overcoming the source and the memories associated with them. A sudden and dramatic hearing loss as a result of an explosion or combat injury can lead to a veteran reliving that day in their mind every time it is discussed. In the case of TBIs, the brain injury can

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overshadow the hearing loss and make it incredibly difficult to treat effectively. Combine with that the fact that these are topics that your veteran patient will most likely be hesitant to share. However, to effectively treat veterans holistically, these other comorbidities must be acknowledged. That means a few more questions and a little extra patience may be in order.

## **What are some tips and strategies for health care providers who want to better assist their veteran patients?**

The key is awareness. It goes without saying that the more hearing healthcare providers know about their patients, the better they are able to treat them. That can be a little tougher challenge when it comes to veterans. But cracking through that tough veneer and helping veterans understand that receiving treatment is not a weakness is the key to providing holistic care and a better life for our veterans and their families.

Fortunately, bonding with veteran patients can be as easy as a few questions, starting with asking where they served. Don't be afraid to ask about their time in uniform and let them tell you their story. Not only will this quickly build rapport, but you may also learn some valuable information about your veteran patient that can help you treat them more effectively.

Introduce them to the Heroes With Hearing Loss program so they know there are proven, lifestyle-focused solutions out there that can work for them. But most importantly, so that they know they are not alone in their hearing loss journey. You can also check out the [Heroes With Hearing Loss blog](#) for further insights.

For more information about the Heroes With Hearing Loss Program, visit [HeroesWithHearingLoss.org](https://HeroesWithHearingLoss.org) or email [Info@HeroesWithHearingLoss.org](mailto:Info@HeroesWithHearingLoss.org).

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