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Saving the Lives of War Veterans

An interview with Professor Marvin Westwood
Men's Health Researcher, University of British Columbia

How can we better aid returning veterans?

Vets are returning back to Canada and the Veterans Affairs and other military government offices have services for them. But they tend to be traditional services – one-on-one – and they are in clinical settings. Most soldiers, most men, would not go and feel very good saying “I am injured. I am weak”, so they avoid it.

What does your research do to help?

In the last 2 years, we have now developed a program for men and how they can seek comfortably assistance when they are struggling with issues like depression or confusion, because men tend not to go for help when they need it. And my team is trained to help them create the challenges and the solutions through men helping other men. They are more at ease and the approach isn't sitting around talking, it's doing things. So that's the focus. It's kind of the action-based model.

We don't use clinical language at all. Recovery from the trauma, simply dropping the baggage, picking up tools, getting the resources I need in life, and probably how to achieve my life goals, I need some assistance. So it's destigmatized and de-medicalized. And that seems to be more at ease for them. We really started this program at UBC and it's outside of the military. We've now got the respect of the Veteran Affairs and they help fund us, and they don't expect any records to be sent to them. So the guys come, and it's totally confidential, and the military employers will never know they attended.

Why is your research important?

Helping people repair from a war-related injury, coming back to Canada, is the best investment you can make in another human being. The more people you can treat when they come back, the less trouble families are going to have; the more productive citizens you're going to have; and some of them get their souls back.