

The Telephone Lifestyle Coaching (TLC) Pilot

The VHA Preventive Care Program focuses on decreasing risky health behaviors to reduce the burden of chronic disease and optimize health within the Veteran population. One of the components of the Preventive Care Program is a pilot test of Telephone Lifestyle Coaching (TLC) for Healthy Living. Telephone coaching has been proven effective for health behavior change across a variety of behaviors, including nutrition, physical activity, weight management, tobacco cessation, stress management and unhealthy alcohol use (Eakin et al., 2007; Kim et al. 2009; Lawler et al., 2010; Goode et al., 2012)

The TLC pilot is currently open for referrals. The program consists of nine calls with a dedicated health coach for behavior change in one or more of the following areas:

- Strive for a Healthy Weight
- Eat Wisely
- Manage Stress
- Be Tobacco Free
- Be Physically Active
- Limit Alcohol

A program evaluation survey will be completed at 6 months after enrollment to collect data on Veterans' progress and satisfaction.

Coaching methods used in TLC

To achieve effective behavior change in the six health behavior goal areas noted above, highly trained TLC health coaches use Social Cognitive Theory, Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Mindfulness techniques. All coaching is conducted over the phone.

Strive For a Healthy Weight

The weight management approach used in the TLC pilot is based on the VA's successful MOVE!® Weight Management Program (VA 2006); the NIH Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults (NIH, 1998); and the US Preventive Services Task Force recommendation (LeBlanc et al., 2011), that clinicians screen all adults for obesity and offer intensive counseling and behavioral interventions to promote sustained weight loss for obese adults.

Be Tobacco Free

The tobacco cessation approach used in TLC is based on the highly effective Quit For Life® Program; the only commercial tobacco cessation program in the U.S. that has outcomes documented in large, randomized clinical trials and proof of effectiveness published in peer-reviewed scientific journals over the course of 25 years. The program incorporates the strategies outlined in the U.S. Public Health Service Clinical Practice Guideline, Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence (Fiore et al., 2008), and shown to be effective in five large randomized trials (Orleans et al., 1991; Curry et al., 1998; Swan et al., 2007; Hollis et al., 2007; McAfee et al., 2008).

Eat Wisely

The nutrition approach used in TLC is based on the MOVE![®] Weight Management Program for Veterans as well as the “Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension” (DASH) study. Veterans work with a highly trained Registered Dietitian to develop an eating plan that is high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains and low-fat dairy and low in total and saturated fat. Considerable research has shown that following this kind of eating plan not only lowers blood pressure but also reduces cholesterol, improves components of the Metabolic Syndrome, and helps with weight management (Appel et al., 1997; Fung et al., 2008; Lien et al., 2007).

Be Physically Active

The physical activity approach used in TLC is based on the recommendations from the American College of Sports Medicine and on the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (www.health.gov/paguidelines). Our approach is to recommend 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity physical activity and/or 10,000 steps per day, along with a reduction in sedentary activity. For Veterans with a specific goal to increase physical activity and fitness, the designated TLC coaches and, if needed, an exercise physiologist, will work with them to develop and follow a more specialized physical activity plan. TLC coaches are trained in working with individuals with physical limitations or disabilities and can make referrals to relevant medical specialists within the VA as necessary.

Manage Stress

The stress management approach used in TLC is based on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Veterans will be taught to identify their stressors and develop strategies for handling them. Veterans will be coached on mindfulness meditation, mindful eating, managing chronic pain through mindfulness, and mindfulness for depression and anxiety. MBSR and related mindfulness-based approaches have been extensively studied (Fjorback et al., 2011; Praissman, 2008), including in VA populations (Kearney et al., submitted manuscript), and have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, improve depression, reduce chronic pain, and improve stress-related conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Veterans will also be offered coaching on alternative stress management techniques if desired.

Limit Alcohol

The approach to limiting alcohol used in TLC is based on the guidelines provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) in *Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much: A Clinician’s Guide* (Updated 2005 Edition) and *Rethinking Drinking: Alcohol and Your Health*; as well as the VA/DoD Evidence-Based Practice Clinical Practice Guideline for Management of Substance Use Disorders. NIAAA guidelines define “low-risk” drinking as no more than four drinks on a single day and 14 drinks per week for men, and no more than three drinks on a single day and seven drinks per week for women. Our approach is designed to reduce the daily and weekly consumption of alcohol to low-risk levels or abstinence and to decrease the harm associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption. The results of several meta-analyses have clearly demonstrated the efficacy of such brief interventions in reducing alcohol use and associated negative consequences among adults (Whitlock et al., 1995; 2004; Dunn et al., 2006, Bradley et al., 2011).

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