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Therapeutic Benefits of Certified Canines for Support of Veterans with War-Related Trauma
Disorders

Lauren Smith

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Abstract

Veterans and their service dogs share a special relationship that is not only a friendship but a working relationship as well. They each give each other something that they cannot get on their own. The purpose of this thesis is to determine the relationship between veterans and their service dogs and the emotional and physical support provided. A review of the literature, combined with systematic interviews of combat veterans led to an initial understanding of the relationship between a veteran and a service dog and the benefits and risks associated with this special connection.

Keywords: service dogs, PTSD, veterans

Literature Review

Introduction

Out of any war comes not only physical injuries but also mental health challenges. Combat related support provided by traditional medical care may ease the impact of physical injury but the long-term effects of combat often require alternative approaches to address mental health challenges. Among effective alternative approaches used, service dogs are increasingly emerging as a key part of the healing process, enabling the combat veteran to once again participate and engage in everyday occupations. The amount of evidence about the effectiveness of service dogs and their duties to their veterans is small but increasing. This study includes a review of the literature and systematic interviews with two combat veterans, which provided a better understanding of the military experiences that these veterans have gone through, the trauma related disorders that can stem from these experiences, the connection and science behind their relationship with their service dog, and the benefits of having a service dog.

Military Involvement and Repercussions

The members of the military fight to defend our country and it does so in an environment which emulates discipline, professionalism, and cohesion. There are also subcultures based on the units they reside in such as infantry, special operations, and whether one is an officer or enlisted member of the service. The typical soldier has only a high school degree and has to spend at least four years in the military to fulfill his/her commitment. They can serve these four years in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, National Guard, or the US Coast Guard. The culture of masculinity and toughness resides throughout all branches of the armed forces. In this culture, many are afraid to seek out treatment for mental health issues they might be facing due

to the barriers and stigmas to care that exist. These include a fear of being seen as weak by their peers, that their leaders would treat them differently, that people around them would lose confidence in their abilities, or simply the availability of services (Hsu, 2010).

Veterans returning from the Afghan and Iraq wars are being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological conditions due to combat exposure at high rates (Krause-Parello, Sarni, & Padden, 2016). Approximately 7.6% of these veterans are diagnosed with PTSD while 25% of veterans seeking treatment from the VA are also diagnosed with a psychological condition (Krause-Parello, Sarni, & Padden, 2016). Being diagnosed with any such mental disorder is difficult and coupled with transitioning from being an active duty member to veteran/civilian status is a significant, life-long challenge. Not being able to adapt to this transition easily puts a veteran at risk for substance abuse, homelessness, and suicide. The behaviors associated with PTSD affect not only the individual and their family, but society on the whole. Not only is PTSD a problem for individuals but its impact is far reaching on families, friends, co-workers and others who are connected to the veteran (Krause-Parello, Sarni, & Padden, 2016).

Veterans with Trauma Related Disorders

As a debilitating psychiatric disorder, PTSD, presenting with symptoms of constant hypervigilance, over-arousal, re-experiencing traumatic events, and participating in self-medicating/numbing behaviors (Gillett & Weldrick, 2014). Symptoms may include flashbacks and nightmares that surface months after a traumatic incident (American Psychological Association, 2003). Not only does PTSD present as these disruptive behaviors but it is also linked to a higher rate of suicide (Krause-Parello, Sarni, & Padden, 2016). Healthcare

professionals use behavioral approaches, pharmaceuticals, support groups, cognitive behavioral therapy, eye movement desensitization therapy, and other exposure and trauma-related therapies to treat PTSD. Despite these treatments many individuals still display symptoms of PTSD (Krause-Parello, Sarni, & Padden, 2016). Diagnosing PTSD is often difficult due to its varying degrees of severity. The management and total experience of PTSD by veterans also varies on the psychological, personal, cultural, and social factors surrounding them (Gillett & Weldrick, 2014).

PTSD presents many symptoms that make it impossible for someone to be an active participant in their own life. Symptoms such as hyperarousal force the body into a fight-or-flight response that interferes with focus and concentration, a normal sleep pattern, and increased irritability. Re-experiencing the events can cause significant hyperarousal and negatively impact the individual's mental state at any time. An avoidance state, or numbing, can occur, which essentially puts the person into a dissociated-like state resulting in the inability to be present. He or she will demonstrate minimal interest in what is happening around them and develop a sense of hopelessness and withdrawal from friends and family (National Veterans Foundation, 2015).

Treatments for Trauma Disorders

Treatment for PTSD can be provided across many different areas of the healthcare spectrum. One frequently used approach for all people, including veterans, is cognitive behavioral therapy, which includes exposure therapy and cognitive restructuring. Exposure therapy is a process in which people face their fears by gradually being exposed to them. This is done in a safe and calm environment with a therapist to help explain what is happening and to help the individual cope with what he/she is feeling. Cognitive restructuring works towards

helping people make sense of the negative memories and trauma. Occasionally people remember the event differently than it happened or feel guilt or shame focusing around what occurred. In this situation, a therapist helps people see the event realistically. Talk therapies and support groups are also shown to be helpful for veterans. The benefits of talk therapies include relaxation benefits, how to use anger control skills, sharing coping tips, and helping each other identify unnecessary feelings of guilt or shame related to the event (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016).

Medications are also a very common form of treatment. Many veterans are prescribed an antidepressant, which helps reduce the symptoms of depression and PTSD. If prescribed an antidepressant, doctors will usually try to pair it with psychotherapy (NIMH, 2016). Medications to help with insomnia are also commonly prescribed as a means to reduce symptoms of PTSD (NIMH, 2016).

In some cases, a certified canine can be introduced into a veteran's life to help alleviate the symptoms of PTSD and provide aid. The use of a certified service dog benefits individuals in biological, psychological, and social aspects. Gillett & Weldrick state the positive effects of animal exposure to the human body. They indicate that through exposure to animals, such as dogs, the body releases oxytocin, which can counteract the symptoms of PTSD (Gillett & Weldrick, 2014). Other neurotransmitters can also be released through contact with animals that help lower blood pressure and improve mood (Gillett & Weldrick, 2014). Trained service dogs can help individuals adjust in maladaptive emotional states, thus providing greater ability to interact with others. The use of canines also promotes reduction of psychological symptoms especially when the dog is trained to perform certain tasks for the individual rather than just

being there to play and provide friendship. As far as social benefits go, dogs can help lessen loneliness, decrease tendency to isolate, help facilitate relationships with others, and generally improve quality of life (Gillett & Weldrick, 2014).

There are many treatment options available for PTSD but it is crucial that individuals suffering from PTSD consider all options and work with their healthcare professionals in order to find the best combination of treatment options.

Human-Animal Connection

The relationship between canines and humans has existed for millions of years. It started with cavemen and wolves and it occurs today in the form of family pets, working dogs in the military and police force, and service and therapy dogs. Throughout history, dogs have followed their masters to the battlefield and refused to leave their sides. They have refused to leave the graves of their masters long after death. Dogs have literally stood by the side of humans in the hardest of times (Urichuk & Anderson, 2003).

Before psychotropic medications were developed, dogs and other animals were originally used in mental hospitals as companions for the people with mental illnesses (Urichuk & Anderson, 2003). Dogs are sources of unconditional love, a way for people to express love to another being, and are an effective social “ice breaker.” For people in wheelchairs or with a visible physical disability, they have noticed that in social situations other people around them are more willing to interact with them when they have their dogs. The implications for this are hopeful in that individuals who have a tendency to be isolated can be drawn to social groups with the help of an animal by their side. Animals, and dogs especially, forge positive relationships with humans that provide them with love and other necessities and, in return, humans receive the

unconditional love and support that they crave from them (Urichuk & Anderson, 2003).

What is a certified canine?

To be a certified service canine, a dog completes an evaluation process to determine if it is suitable for service. It must be sociable, comfortable being touched and able to enjoy their duties, reliable, controllable at all times, and able to cope with stressful situations (Urichuk & Anderson, 2003).

According to the organization Patriot Paw, an organization that is certified by Assistance Dogs International (ADI), there are nine minimal standards that a service dog needs to achieve before becoming certified.

1. The service dog must follow commands (basic commands) 90% of the time in public and home environments.
2. The service dog will demonstrate obedience to basic commands through voice commands or hand signals. The commands would include sitting, lying down, staying in place, or walking next to the client.
3. The dog must meet standards of Assistance Dogs in Public regarding behavior and demonstrate good behavior at home as well.
4. The service dog will endure training that teaches them how to perform at least three tasks related to assisting their client with their disability.
5. The client and their service dog must have a full understanding of ADI minimum standards, the performance of the three tasks, knowledge of training techniques, an understanding of how to care for their canine, the understanding that they must continue training, and a knowledge of local laws about service animals.

6. Client and canine must complete follow up visits as requested.
7. Identification of the canine and client must be present at all times and the canine needs a garment identifying them as a service dog.
8. The certifying organization must demonstrate a knowledge of their client's disabilities.
9. The service dog must be spayed/neutered and be up to date on all vaccinations along with records of these (Patriot Paws Service Dogs, 2016).

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, Disability Rights Section, service animals are defined as “dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.” The tasks that are performed by these dogs include leading those who are blind, alerting those who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, protecting someone having a seizure, reminding someone to take their medications, calming someone with PTSD during an anxiety attack, or performing other general duties that help their human. The dogs providing these tasks are categorized as service dogs. Dogs who only provide solely emotional support are not referred to as a certified service dog (ADA, 2011).

Tasks Performed by Certified Canines

Service dogs can assist individuals with many different tasks related to specific illnesses, disabilities, or conditions. These dogs are trained to perform tasks when their partners are experiencing adverse effects or symptoms associated with their specific illness, disability, or condition. Individuals with epilepsy or seizure disorders can utilize their service dogs to summon help, either by finding a person to assist with a situation or implementing an emergency response device. These dogs can help pull away objects from the person that could harm them during a seizure and make sure the environment is safe. If a dog's partner suffers from absence seizures, it

can block him/her from walking into any kind of danger or obstacle. The dog can also attempt to rouse the person from unconsciousness and comfort them after the seizure. These dogs are effective at carrying medical identification material for their partner and sensing impending seizures and warning their partner (Canines 4 Hope, 2015).

Service dogs can be utilized with individuals with autism. Children or adults that exhibit excessive running can be stopped and led back to their caregivers by their service dogs. If this individual starts a pattern of self-injurious behavior, the service dog can interrupt the behavior and help the individual calm himself. If a child with autism experiences a nightmare or behavioral episode at night the service dog can alert the parents to assist the child. These dogs are effective at sensing their partner's behavior and calm or cheer them up. If a child with autism is non-verbal, they can learn to give their dog commands in their own way and have a special way of interacting with them. With specific behaviors such as PICA, a condition often associated with autism in which a person ingests non-edible items, and self-stimulating behaviors, the dog can interrupt the behavior and alert the care providers. Having a constant social support for someone with autism is extremely beneficial (Canines 4 Hope, 2015).

Dogs who are provided to assist individuals with physical disabilities are able to perform a wide variety of tasks for their partners. They are taught to retrieve medications and other items from inside cupboards or drawers. If its partner is having an emergency, the dog can bring the phone to their partner or even use a special phone to alert authorities. The service canines are also trained to turn lights on and off and help find keys. If its partner has an illness such as diabetes or epilepsy the dog can alert their partner to an oncoming seizure or high/low blood sugar. For someone with a physical disability it can be difficult or tiring to get their socks and

shoes off but if the individual has a service dog, it will can be trained to help him/her accomplish this task. A service dog can carry laundry and groceries for their partner or even get the mail. If the physical disability does not require a wheelchair the service dog can help its partner walk safely (Canines 4 Hope, 2015).

Service dogs can also assist their partners who may have depression. They can help in a medical crisis and they can also provide their partner with the best coping strategy and companion. In the case of emotional overload, the dog is trained to calm and comfort its partner (Canines 4 Hope, 2015).

Benefits of Certified Canines for Veterans

Service dogs who are specifically trained for helping with PTSD focus on emotional distress relief for their partners, such as reducing nervousness or anxiety. In the case of a medical crisis, the service dog can assist their partner or seek help. The service dog is there to assist during times of emotional distress. If the symptoms of PTSD are starting to negatively impact daily function, the service dog is there to provide constant support. If in a crowd or public place, the service dog can also provide a bubble or barrier around its partner to keep people from rushing their partner or bumping into them by accident and triggering PTSD symptoms. When this support is provided by the canine, the partner's serotonin levels raise to create a sense of happiness or well-being (Canines 4 Hope, 2015). The partner's blood pressure decreases as his or her stress decreases (Canines 4 Hope, 2015).

Service dogs are so effective and can perform many amazing tasks for their partners who are need assistance in their daily life, emotionally or physically. They can alert or bark to any member of the household to notify them of an issue with their partner. They can physically brace

themselves to help their partners rise from a chair or from a fall. They can also be trained to remind their partners of a certain time to take their medications or alert them to a smoke alarm or doorbell. When their partner is struggling to achieve full consciousness, the service dog is trained to lick their faces until they are able to come back to the current moment. The service dog can also, on cue, take its partner away from a troubling situation to help ease symptoms. During a full panic attack, the dog is trained to provide proprioceptive input and lay on its partner until commanded to stop. The input calms the nervous system so he or she can fight off the symptoms more easily. The service dog can also provide comfort in security. If the partner thinks someone is in the house, the dog can alert him or her to intruders and keep them safe (Froling, 2009).

Methods

Research Design: This review of the literature paired with systematic interviews explored the lives of three veterans with service dogs. Although three veterans is a small sample size, the qualitative process was followed to gather information. The Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board approved this project and informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted.

Data Collection: Data regarding lifestyle information, duties of service dog, and mental and emotional health were collected during systematic interviews. Interviews were collected in person and over the phone and did not last for more than thirty minutes each. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed onto an encrypted computer.

Analysis: First, the interview transcripts were read multiple times in order to find common themes between the two participant's responses. Next, five common themes were pulled from each transcript that embodied relevant information regarding the relationship

between the veterans and their dogs. After these themes were identified, quotes from the interviews were identified that fell into each themed category.

Participants

The participants of this study consist of one male veteran aged 35 and one aged 26, and one female veteran aged 53. These veterans were all willing and emotionally able to undergo a total 60-minute interview. Interviewee A is a veteran of the Iraqi/Afghanistan war. Interviewee B is a veteran of Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, and Guantanamo Bay. Interviewee C is a veteran of Afghanistan and the Battle of Marjah. The inclusion criteria for this study were currently utilizing a service canine, a military veteran, and speaks English.

Procedures

The face to face interviews took place in quiet and private areas set forth by the interviewees. Questions asked of the interviewees range from questions about active duty, emotional distress, and relationship and accessibility aspects of having a service dogs. Interviewees were free to decline answering any questions posed during the interview. They were also free to end the interview at any time. Mental health resources such as the Battle Creek VA and other community resources were suggested after the interview so interviewees could receive alternative care in case the interview caused distress. A small, unobtrusive voice recorder were then used during the interviews to capture the stories of our participants. The recordings were transcribed onto a computer where they were encrypted and deleted as soon as the thematic analysis was complete. Interviewees were aware of the recording process. A transcription software was used to transcribe the interviews. The interviews were analyzed for common themes regarding service dogs and their relationship with veterans.

Thematic Analysis

Man's Best Friend

To our participants, their canine companions are their best friends. They are constantly present in their lives through ups and downs and thick and thin. With a condition that craves support, the loyal love and support of a dog is priceless. These sentiments were repeatedly reflected in our interviews. Interviewee A stated that after an initial adjustment period, “We are best friends. We do everything together.” (personal communication, March 27, 2017). He elaborated on the activities they do together on a daily basis, “We went down the river for eight and a half hours together. He goes to hockey games with me and we went to Boyne” (personal communication, March 27, 2017). Interviewee B described her relationship with her dog as, “Pet me. I’m here with you. Cuddle me. Anything you need” (personal communication, March 25, 2017). Interviewee C stated that his dog, “Is my best friend and my biggest supporter” (personal communication, April 4, 2017). These dogs are a constant, positive presence in these veterans’ lives. When there is a relationship like that in someone’s life, it is hard not to become best friends. It would seem the old adage is true, dogs really are man’s best friend.

Reduce Isolation, Increase Social Participation

Before bringing a service dog into their lives, our interviewees were experiencing anxiousness, nervousness, loneliness, and depression. In fact, interviewee A stated, “That whole year [before his dog] I didn’t leave the house probably a dozen times. Since I’ve had [my dog] I’ve been on more trips than I ever have” (personal communication, March 27, 2017). Interviewee B is contemplating taking her dog to the VA hospital in her area so that other veterans can benefit from her too. “She would really like to go to the VA, I think... If we could

work that into both of our schedules, that would be great for both of us” (personal communication, March 25, 2017). Interviewee B realizes the benefits of her dog so much that she wants to reach out to others in order to make their lives better and happier as well.

Interviewee C said, “He allows me to function mostly incident free in public” (personal communication, April 4, 2017). Their dogs inspire them to get out of the house and do things with other people. Going to hockey games, going on trips, and helping others are just a few of the activities their dogs help them accomplish.

We Talk It Out, We Pet It Out, We Walk It Out

Not only are these dogs used to prevent and reduce loneliness, they are crucial in stress reduction. When interviewee A is in a situation where he’s feeling nervous or anxious, all he has to do is remember, “To look down and be able to see him and deflect that negative energy” (personal communication, March 27, 2017). His dog even recognizes his stress and, if in public, will start whining so that he has an excuse to get up and leave the situation (personal communication, March 27, 2017). Interviewee B’s dog knows that touch is really important for her. When she knows that her owner is feeling stressed, “She comes up and she will either put her head on my lap or if I am standing, she knows to come up and brush my leg... She will stay there until you pay attention to her because she knows that I need to pet her to de-stress” (personal communication, March 25, 2017). For dealing with the stresses of everyday life, “We talk it out. We pet it out. We walk it out. Those are the three biggest things” (personal communication, March 25, 2017). Interviewee C said that when he’s upset his dog, “Nudges my hand, forces me to focus on him, if in public he pulls me away from crowds and stressful areas” (personal communication, April 4, 2017). The physical touch and presence of their dogs is what

eases their stress and pain. The presence of these dogs in their daily lives is what makes them better.

Lost Without You

Although these interviewees count on, “By federal law my dog is allowed,” their dogs don’t always go everywhere with them (personal communication, March 27, 2017). In some of his most stressful situations, interviewee A cannot take his dog into the dentist or doctor’s office. He understands there are sanitation standards and he leaves his dog in the waiting room and anxiously awaits their reunion (personal communication, March 27, 2017). When he is away from his dog and asked if the separation causes additional anxiety, his answer was a simple one, “Yes, absolutely” (personal communication, March 27, 2017). One of his dog’s most important tasks is to help wake him from nightmares. It is still a work in progress and, “He’s gotten my face a couple times really good but he’s woken me up.” As his dog must paw at his face to wake him rather than barking (personal communication, March 27, 2017). If he did not have his dog to interrupt these nightmares, they would only start to make life during the day harder. Interviewee A values the benefits his dog provides him at all hours of the day. Interviewee B works full time as an athletic trainer at a physical therapy clinic and for logistical reasons chooses not to have her dog at work with her. But when asked about that situation her answer was, “One of the reasons why I work eight hours a day rather than ten is because I can’t handle being away from her that long” (personal communication, March 25, 2017). After a long day at work, interviewee B cannot wait to get back to her dog and see her best friend and experience the symptomatic relief she experiences when with her. Interviewee C’s response about coping when separated from his dog was, “Usually can’t sleep or get very scared and worried” (personal communication, April 4,

2017).

What If?

The most important and revealing question asked in these interviews was where would our interviewees be without their dogs? Each person had to think for a second as if the thought of being without their dogs was unimaginable. Interviewee A's response was, "I'd probably be... I don't know where I'd be but I don't think it'd be in a good place" (personal communication, March 27, 2017). Interviewee B reflected on the fact that now that she has her dog she does not have to attend as much counseling. Without her dog she, "Would probably be a wreck. Yeah. A lot more anxiousness at work, a lot more depression" (personal communication, March 25, 2017). When asked about life without his dog, Interviewee C responded, "I don't think I'd have very much of a life without my dog" (personal communication, April 4, 2017).

Discussion

Dogs help these veterans immensely. Hearing such personal stories about the impact of a furry friend on such a dark and crippling disease really sparks a passion for more research on the subject. Trauma disorders are not exclusive to veterans and more research on the benefits of canines to in reducing symptoms of PTSD could benefit many individuals with the disorder. Dogs and humans share a unique and mutually beneficial relationship. It only makes sense that instead of flooding the human body with pharmaceuticals, it could be flooded with oxytocin from the loving relationship we share with these creatures.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lay mostly in the small sample size. The idea of the study was to contribute to a growing field that lacks a great deal of evidence based research. The study

looked at only citizens of the United States that had fought in recent wars. To build stronger research, the participants would need to be veterans from different wars, from different backgrounds, and from various areas of the US and world. It would also be important to know if the interviewees had other diagnoses besides PTSD.

Need for More Research

About 60% of men and 50% of women experience a traumatic event at least once in their life. Out of those people, 7-8% will develop PTSD in their lifetime. Since PTSD in veterans is usually accompanied by another mental health issue, it makes it more difficult to deal with (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). Being that many people experience trauma, we should have more resources available for treatment beyond pharmaceuticals and talk therapies. The opportunity to use dogs as a complementary treatment needs to be researched more thoroughly so that it may be utilized by more people to lessen the effects of PTSD and other mental health disorders.

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Appendix A

Western Michigan University

Department of Occupational Therapy

Principal Investigator: Ben Atchison, PhD, OTRL, FAOTA

Co-Student Investigator: Erin Caspers

Co-Student Investigator: Lauren Smith

Title of Study: Therapeutic Benefits of Certified Canines on Veterans with War-Related Trauma Disorders

You are invited to participate in a research project. The project is titled *Therapeutic Benefits of Certified Canines on Veterans with War-Related Trauma Disorders*. This project is Erin Caspers and Lauren Smith's thesis for the Lee Honors College at Western Michigan University. This document will explain the purpose of this research project and will cover many things. Time commitments, the strategies used in the study, and the risks and benefits of being a part of this research project are included. Please read this consent form with care and ask any questions if you need help.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The benefits service dogs could give veterans with war-related trauma disorders (PTSD, anxiety, depression, social isolation, etc.).

Who can participate in this study?

Must be a veteran receiving support from a service dog.

Where will this study take place?

This study will take place in a private area chosen by the interviewers and the interviewees.

What is the time commitment for involving yourself in this study?

You are being asked to participate in an interview lasting 45-60 minutes, based on the information you want to share. This will be a one-time commitment of your time.

What are you asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

If you choose to be in this study, you are asked to answer questions related to how your service dog has helped you in your life.

What information is measured during this study?

The information being measured in the study will focus on quality of life, coping strategies, social involvement, mental health, and overall health.

What are the risks of engaging in this study and how can these risks be minimized?

The anticipated risks of participating in this study include discomfort related to the questions. However, the interviewers have been trained in talking with vulnerable populations and will end the interview if needed. If your emotional distress continues, counseling services are available at the following locations.

- Battle Creek VA Medical Center: (888) 214-1247
- Behavioral Health Services, Unified Clinics: (269) 387-7000
- Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services: (269) 553-8000

Data collected from the interviews will be recorded, but the analysis of the study will not reveal the names of any people.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

The most important benefit is that you will be able to add to our understanding of how service dogs can assist veterans struggling with war-related trauma disorders. What we learn from this study may help us provide more research to this population. However, there are no direct benefits of participating in this study.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

There are no costs associated with participating in this study, except for time.

Is there any pay for participating in this study?

There is no pay for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the data collected during this study?

All of the information from your session will be held in strict privacy. Only members of the research team will see any of the information from the interviews.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any penalty for your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences if you choose to withdraw from this study. Your service dog will not be affected in any way by your decision to participate and/or pull from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

If you have any questions before or during the study, you can contact the principal investigator, Ben Atchison at (269) 387-7270 or ben.atchison@wmich.edu, and/or the co-student investigators, Erin Caspers at (989) 450-0972 or erin.k.caspers@wmich.edu, and Lauren Smith at (269) 830-8071 or lauren.m28.smith@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, and Western Michigan University at (269) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at (269) 387-8298 if questions come up during the course of the study. The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) has approved this consent document for use for one year by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not partake in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Appendix B

Background Information:

Age:

Marital Status:

Occupational History:

Duration of Military Service:

War(s)/Location served:

When did you first start receiving services from canine?

Interview Questions:

- Where did you complete active duty?
- Is your dog considered a service dog, a therapy dog, an emotional support dog, or companion dog?
- What service/organization provided you with your service dog?
- Describe your first month with your dog. (Adjustment period?)
- Have you ever faced any accessibility issues with your dog? Public businesses/buildings? Flights? Hotels? Restaurants?
- How does/did your dog fit in with your family?
- Has it ever felt difficult to care for your dog? Expenses? Responsibility? Time constraints?
- What, if any, duties does your dog perform for you?
- If you're separated from your dog, how do you cope?
- Do you attend counseling or receive other mental health services?
- If you could do the whole process over, would you change anything?
- If you are upset or sad, what actions does your dog take to comfort or distract you?
- Do you feel your life would be different without your dog? If so, how?
- Did you seek professional help yourself or was it recommended to you?
- Have you ever felt that you have been treated differently because of your service dog?