

Caring for Veterans of Foreign Militaries at End-of-Life

As a self-proclaimed nation of immigrants, the United States is the final resting place for many foreign-born individuals. This includes individuals who served in foreign militaries and receive hospice care in the United States. The term Veterans of foreign militaries (VoFM) is used to describe individuals who served in a nation, other than the United States', military and now reside in the US (i.e., a service member of the Ukrainian Military who now resides in the US).

This guide synthesizes information obtained from We Honor Veteran (WHV) hospice partners into an overview of Veterans of foreign militaries' end-of-life experiences and suggested best practices hospice organizations can incorporate. Given the diversity among VoFM, WHV partners are encouraged to utilize their best judgment in determining the most appropriate practices for caring for VoFM's.

Veterans of Foreign Militaries (VoFM)

In a survey of WHV hospice partners, **56% of respondents reported providing end-of-life support and recognition to VoFM.**

80% of WHV hospice partner respondents agreed that a **Veterans service in a foreign military greatly impacts their end-of-life experience.**

Challenges for Veterans of Foreign Militaries (VoFM) on Hospice

The end-of-life experience for VoFM can both closely resemble and differ greatly from the experience of United States Veterans. Unique challenges encountered by VoFM at end-of-life can include:

- **Isolation:** VoFM residing in the U.S. have the added challenge of residing outside of their country of origin. Resultingly, VoFM may feel disconnected from US cultural norms, be physically isolated from their family and friends, and lack comradery from fellow Veterans. VoFM that also identify as members of groups that have been historically marginalized may face additional challenges.
- **Guilt:** VoFM may experience intense feelings of guilt or shame if they were involved in an unpopular conflict or served in the military of a nation that was not allied with the US.
- **Lack of Recognition:** Foreign nations may not offer recognition for their Veterans. Similarly, the families of VoFM may be unaware of the patient's military service.
- **Psychosocial Conditions:** As a result of their service, VoFM may experience PTSD, suicidal ideation, and moral injury.

Identifying Veterans of Foreign Militaries (VoFM) Receiving Hospice Care

Many hospice and palliative care providers may be unaware of VoFM on their service. Utilizing the [Military History Checklist](#) and employing open-ended questions for inquiring about a patients' military history is an effective means of identifying VoFM. It is important that hospice staff maintain awareness of the potential for identifying and caring for Veterans that have served in foreign militaries.

"As a Veteran, myself I have always respected and honored Veterans from other countries regardless of what side they fall on in regards to politics or policies."

- WHV Hospice Partner

Caring for Veterans of Foreign Militaries (VoFM) at End-of-Life

WHV hospice partners report engaging in the following activities to support the unique needs of VoFM and their families at end-of-life:

Recognition Ceremonies: Hospices can provide a recognition ceremony that acknowledges the nation's military the Veteran served in. WHV partners report that VoFM and their families are extremely grateful for recognition of their military service. To recognize a VoFM's service, providers can present the VoFM with [WHV's Veteran of Foreign Military Certificates](#). These certificates can be edited to reflect the Veteran's country of service.

Screening for PTSD, Moral Injury, and Suicidal Ideation: VoFM may experience PTSD, moral injury, or suicidal ideation as a result of their service. It is critical that providers maintain knowledge of signs and symptoms of psychosocial conditions and appropriately screen for these conditions when applicable. See [WHV's Screening Guide for Veterans](#) for more information.

Providing a Safe and Non-Judgmental Environment: Allowing VoFM to share about their military experience in an accepting and non-judgmental environment can combat VoFM's feelings of isolation, guilt, and shame. Posing open-ended questions such as, "How did your military service shape you?" invites the Veteran to share their experience and can also assist providers in identifying additional care needs. These conversations can also be a useful learning experience for providers. One WHV partner shared, "I think our best education [comes] from the individual about their specific experiences." For further guidance on culturally sensitive practices, please refer to NHPCO's [Inclusion Toolkit](#) and [Communications Guide](#).

Creating Comradery: WHV hospice partners report increased isolation and lack of social connection as a considerable challenge among VoFM. Fostering comradery between VoFM and US Veterans or other VoFM through Veteran volunteer visits, Vet to Vet cafes open to all service members, and recognition of VoFM at other events can help to combat this isolation.

Burial Assistance: Some VoFM may be eligible for burial in a VA national ceremony. Eligible VoFM can include US citizens who served in the armed forces of any government allied with the US during a war, members of the Philippine armed forces, and Hmong Veterans. [See VA eligibility criteria.](#)

Connections to Benefits: Availability of benefits for VoFM that reside in the US can vary greatly. Some nations may extend benefits to Veterans living outside their country of service. Additionally, the VA provides medical services to beneficiaries of certain nations allied with the US during World War II. [See VA eligibility criteria.](#)

Connecting with Embassies: WHV partners report success contacting foreign embassies and consulates to provide support, recognition, and improved access to benefits for VoFM. [Contact information for foreign embassies & consulates available here.](#)

"We must never forget that Patriotism in any country is a Duty, Honor, and Self Sacrifice"
- WHV hospice partner