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Feature: DND and VAC - The Inability to Solve Systemic Problems

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VVi is for you, all veterans, regardless of whether you belong to a veteran organization or not. VVi is a distribution centre, a conduit for making sure that the information you need as a veteran is there for you in a timely fashion. Our aim is to provide a forum for *all* Canadian veterans, serving members and their families to have access to information pertaining to veteran rights.

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DND and VAC - The Inability to Solve Systemic Problems

By Perry Gray, Chief Editor VVi

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“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” George Santayana

“Leadership starts at the top”

On 5 October 2017, DND and VAC announced their suicide prevention strategy. For many Veterans, it is too late and too little.

The DND Ombudsman, Gary Walbourne, stated the devil will be in the details, noting for example that National Defence and Veterans Affairs have struggled for years to hire mental-health workers. The ombudsman and others also worried that military personnel and veterans will continue to struggle to access some benefits and services unless the government changes its policies. "I'm hearing good talk," Walbourne said. "But I'm a little bit stuck on: Are we just going to put more people into the same processes that we've always used?"

Senior leadership in both departments are guilty of ignoring problems, solutions and advice. For example, "building a smoother, less confusing exit path for soldiers departing the Canadian military will take another two or three years to implement and will likely not include significant recommendations from the Canadian Forces ombudsman" (CBC News 16 Dec 2016).

The Chief of Defence Staff, Jonathan Vance, is a prime example of the failure among leaders. He ordered a review at the Royal Military College after a troubling series of events, including a trio of possible suicides among students and allegations of sexual misconduct. He stated that he was satisfied with the 227-page report and that it demonstrated there are no systemic problems at the institution, least of all with suicide and sexual misconduct. The findings also laid the burden of stress and low morale at the feet of cadets. (CBC 29 Mar 2017)

It is commonly understood that a bad worker blames the tools.

It is obvious to most people, but not the senior CAF leadership. There are systemic problems and the fault should be with the RMC leadership, not the cadets. The report stated that cadets were reluctant to complain for career and social reasons. This is a clear indication of intimidation (intentional behaviour that "would cause a person of ordinary sensibilities" to fear injury or harm).

It was true when Jon Vance was a cadet, and it was true when I was a cadet.

If anyone needs further proof of the failure of senior leadership, then consider the comments made during a day long event on Culture and Diversity in the Armed Forces co-hosted by the CAF, Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR) and Centre for International and Defence Policy (CIDP) of Queen's University on 4 May 2017 in Ottawa. One of the outstanding systemic problems identified by the speakers was the inability of the armed forces as well as police forces to recruit and retain females, members of visible minorities and members of the LBGTQ community.

One of the most identifiable reasons was the perpetuation of the "warrior ethos",

specifically that of Caucasian male heroic stereotypes (John Wayne, Rambo, George Patton, etc.).

This exists because the CAF continues to practice training concepts that are more than 100 years old. These are regularly used to indoctrinate recruits with a single personality regardless of gender or race. Recruits either adopt this single identity or often find themselves shunned by their peers. Those who assimilate are likely to be more successful than those who either can not or refuse to change.

The failure to integrate members of diverse groups is reflected in the low recruitment and retention rates:

Women 15% instead of 25%

Visible minorities 6.5% instead of 11.8%

Native Canadians 2.5% instead of 4.3%

The target numbers are set as part of CAF recruitment policy so that it complies with government policy on ensuring equal opportunities for employment for all Canadians.

Such studies are interesting, but the question that remains unanswered is what is actually being learned?

Unfortunately, events like the one discussed above have been held for many decades and identify the same problems while recommending the same solutions. The real problem is that senior leadership repeatedly fails to implement solutions.

I attended the event with other Veterans, and we had all attended similar events while serving in the CAF going back over four decades!

The first comment that I wrote in my notes was “one fix does not result in organisational improvement”. This echoes the comment made above by the DND ombudsman.

It is the same for suicides, which have been a subject at many DND and VAC sponsored events for decades.

In 2010, the Liberal Party hosted an event to discuss Veterans issues. One of the key speakers was LGen Romeo Dallaire, who discussed the suicides among the CAF contingent sent to Rwanda. It was one of the reasons that he experiences mental health problems.

Suicide has been a subject at the various VAC stakeholder summits, a topic of VAC advisory groups and included in VAC policy. Unfortunately, VAC has repeatedly failed to find solutions and even worse listen to its advisers.

There are plenty of reasons (read excuses) for this failure including the fact that VAC only has access to the medical information of its clients. Clients represent only about 25% of

the total number of Canadian Veterans (200,000 of 800,000). There is a much larger population impacted by the deficiencies of DND and VAC, the families who are also members of the Veterans Community.

One of the major failures of VAC has been the closing of its health care facilities. This occurred because the federal government only agreed to care for “war service Veterans”. So there is no special facility for the “war service Veterans” of the Afghan War, which is the longest conflict in Canadian military history. The reason that they are not real “war service Veterans” is the same reason that VAC initially refused services to Korean War Veterans, they did not fight in a “real” war!

This defies logic. As long as there is a CAF, there is a likelihood of war. Current events support this theory.

Thus there will be a need for military health care facilities for serving and non-serving Veterans. It is why the USA has currently 152 VA medical centres and approximately 1400 community-based outpatient clinics.

By comparison, VAC plans to have two centres of excellence.

Here is an excerpt from the Canadian Third Infantry Division Psychiatric Report, October 1944:

6. There was one thing of note among all troops admitted for exhaustion -- lack of morale or lack of volition to carry on. The foremost cause of this seems to be futility. The men claimed there was nothing to which to look forward -- no rest, no lead, no enjoyment, no normal life and no escape the only ways one could get out of battle were death, wounds, self-inflicted wounds or going “nuts”. The second most prominent cause of this lack of volition seemed to be the insecurity in battle because the conditions of the battlefield did not allow for average cover. The third was the fact that they were seeing too much continual death and destruction, loss of friends, etc. After these came other minor complaints -- lack of use of captured towns, comparisons of treatment received by other forces non-combatants and higher command not allowing them to enjoy the fruits of conquest etc. etc. Most of them had no insight as to why they were being used to fight so hard and steadily. (page 309, Cinderella Army Terry Copp ISBN 0-8020-3925-1)

These observations can be easily appreciated by Veterans, regardless of where or when they served. They are timeless as many Veterans have expressed futility -- with orders, missions, roles, etc.

This contradicts the most basic and important fundamental of military leadership:

“the process of influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation”

So Jon Vance stop blaming others for your failures. This applies equally to the other DND

and VAC leaders, who have failed the Veterans Community. If you fail at your job, then you can expect others to fail because they are following you.

Of note, in a 2006 survey, 47% of those responding answered “somewhat/strongly disagreed” that CAF senior leadership is trusted. Trust, respect and loyalty all words that are important in any military, if they are lacking or even seem to be lacking then there is a systemic problem.

Of note, I had a conversation on 4 October 2017 with the VAC deputy minister, Walt Natynczyk, during which he mentioned the recent VAC survey, which will become a regular operation every two years. I wrote to him later about the systemic problems of surveys and related reviews (such as the RMC review mentioned above). They are often examples of “lies, damned lies and statistics” (British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli).

Surveys are often worded in a way to get the results that the people paying for the poll want. For example, most election polls in 2016 indicated (70-99% certainty) that Hilary Clinton was going to win.

I also reminded him of the dangers of circular reporting, when a report is disseminated by one agency and then disseminated by others until it is widely accepted as being the truth. This applies both to media reporting and military reporting.

Finally, I mentioned directed intelligence in which military leaders reject information that is contrary to their own views.

For example, the presence of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in Iraq before the US invasion in 2003. All reports indicating the presence of WMD's were widely accepted (often without validating the information) and everything else was rejected by senior national leadership.

The lesson to learn is that just because you think that something is true or false, this is not evidence that you are right.

As always, you are free to draw your own conclusions. You are encouraged to do more research because I may be wrong.

Perry Gray is a Regular Force veteran, serving as the Chief Editor of VVi. Perry has been with VVi for 16 years.

Additional Information (add the attached pdf)...

http://veteranvoice.info/archives/periodicals/Periodical_17Oct_Culture and Diversity in CAF.pdf

See Periodical No

201785...http://veteranvoice.info/archive/Periodicals/Periodical_17Oct.htm



You Can Help!

All veterans are encouraged to pass information, opinions, links to self-help sites onto VVi. VeteranVoice.info is a distribution centre and we are dependant on others to pass information. This is your site. Tell other veterans about your site.

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**Veteran's Aide
Memoire**

http://veteranvoice.info/archive/aide_memoire/Vet_Aide_Memoire.pdf



Marijuana For Trauma Inc.
VÉTÉRANS HELPING VÉTÉRANS
**MARIJUANA For Trauma
(MFT)**

<https://mftgroup.ca/>

**National (US) Gulf War
Resources Center, Inc.**

<http://www.ngwrc.org/>



**PPCLI
Association
Volunteer Patricia
Program (VPP)**

<http://vpp.ppcliassoc.ca>



<http://seanbruyea.com>



<https://www.cfpsa.com/Splashpages/SoldierOn/>



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Canada** **Anciens Cor
Canada**

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/>

**V.E.T.S
Veterans Emergency
Transition Services**

<http://www.vetscanada.org/>



Veterans Ombudsman
Ombudsman des vétérans

<http://www.ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca/>



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<http://veteransofcanada.ca/>



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