

Discussion Questions

1,000 Words: Stories from the VA's My Life, My Story Project

by Thor Ringler, Seth Jovaag, and the United States Department
of Veterans Affairs

Questions written by My Life, My Story program staff at the Madison VA Medical Center

Your Response

1. What emotions came up for you reading these stories?
2. Where do you recognize yourself or people you love in these stories?
3. If you were an interviewer with an hour to talk to a stranger, what questions would you ask?
4. If you had an hour to tell a stranger anything you wanted to share about your life, what do you think you'd say?

Healthcare

5. More than 84% of Madison VA Veterans who've been interviewed have consented to add their story to their VA electronic health record, where it can be read by their VA healthcare team (nurses, doctors, social workers, therapists, schedulers, dieticians, etc.). How do you think a patient's story affects ...their healthcare providers? ...the patient's relationship with their healthcare providers?
6. How do stories impact our healing and wellbeing?
7. If given the opportunity, would you want to share a story about your life with your healthcare team? Why or why not?

My Life, My Story Process

8. Stories are written up by VA volunteers and staff writers who interviewed the Veterans. The final stories are far from interview transcripts; writers choose how to organize them, which topics to summarize and emphasize, and what information to include and omit. The Veteran then reviews the story draft and makes final edits. Who's the author of the story?
9. In the electronic health record, stories appear with a note that they are told in the Veteran's own words and are not fact-checked. What could be the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

Veterans

10. Veterans are often referred to as heroes in American culture. What makes a Veteran heroic?
11. How do these stories confirm or challenge prevailing cultural ideas of Veteran identity or Veteran heroism?