

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 29, 2008

CONTACT:
Kristen Porter, 617-859-3036, ext. 23
kporter@pathwaysboston.org

Local Acupuncturists Respond to Mental Health Crisis for Veterans

BOSTON – According to an April 2008 Rand Corporation* study, one in five Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffer from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or major depression.

To address this growing problem, Pathways to Wellness, a Boston-based holistic therapies clinic, has partnered with the Veterans Benefit Clearinghouse (VBC) in Roxbury to offer free acupuncture treatments to veterans and their families. The focus of Pathways' work with veterans is to help with post-combat stress, anxiety, insomnia, and depression and to improve overall quality of life.

Last May Pathways launched a month-long pilot veterans acupuncture program to assess veteran's needs and evaluate utilization rates and response to treatments. The success of the pilot convinced the organization to open a weekly drop in acupuncture program for veterans and their families.

The new program began in October and offers free treatments on Mondays from 6-8pm at the VBC. A dedicated team of eight volunteer licensed acupuncturists provides treatment to the vets in a group setting.

During treatment people sit fully clothed in a circle of chairs while the acupuncturist places needles on each ear. They are invited to close their eyes and rest for 30-45 minutes while the needles remain in place. Acupuncturists use hair-thin sterile needles, which are disposed of after each use.

Acupuncture is a simple, low-cost modality offering immediate, effective, and easily accessible treatment for large numbers of people, and it can work harmoniously with other more conventional treatment modalities such as counseling and medication. Acupuncture is currently being investigated by the Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, DC as a viable treatment modality for PTSD in returning veterans.

Last year at the Veterans Benefit Clearinghouse's annual Stand Down in Boston, Pathways provided two days of free acupuncture treatments to over 70 veterans.

Stand Down offers homeless veterans in Boston resources such as haircuts, clothing, housing advice, health screenings and dental care.

Pathways to Wellness also recently completed a study, funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, on the use of acupuncture and relaxation to help veterans deal with stress and improve their quality of life. During the course of the study, the results of which were extremely positive, homeless vets were treated at the Veterans Administration Domiciliary in Bedford, MA.

About Pathways to Wellness

Pathways to Wellness, a nonprofit public health organization, provides holistic therapies including acupuncture, shiatsu, and Chinese herbal medicine. Open to all people needing care, Pathways practitioners work collaboratively in a team environment and in conjunction with Western medical professionals to offer an integrated approach to care. Pathways to Wellness is one of the largest public health holistic therapies clinics in the country providing 11,000 treatments to over 2,500 clients annually. For more information on Pathways to Wellness and its services visit www.pathwaysboston.org or call 617-859-3036.

About Veterans Benefit Clearinghouse (VBC)

Located at 38 Dudley Street, Roxbury, MA, the Veterans Benefit Clearinghouse is dedicated to improving the quality of life for residents of Greater Boston, with a special focus on providing services to veterans and their families to ensure that they become and remain productive members of society. For more information on VBC's services call 617-541-8846.

* link to information on Rand Corporation study:
<http://www.rand.org/news/press/2008/04/17/>

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