

# Challenges to Personhood:

## PTSD and Moral Injury

Trauma Informed Care Training

July 31, 2020

James VanKirk, MD, FACP

Medical Director

Northern Light Palliative Care

[jvankirk@northernlight.org](mailto:jvankirk@northernlight.org)

# Disclosures:

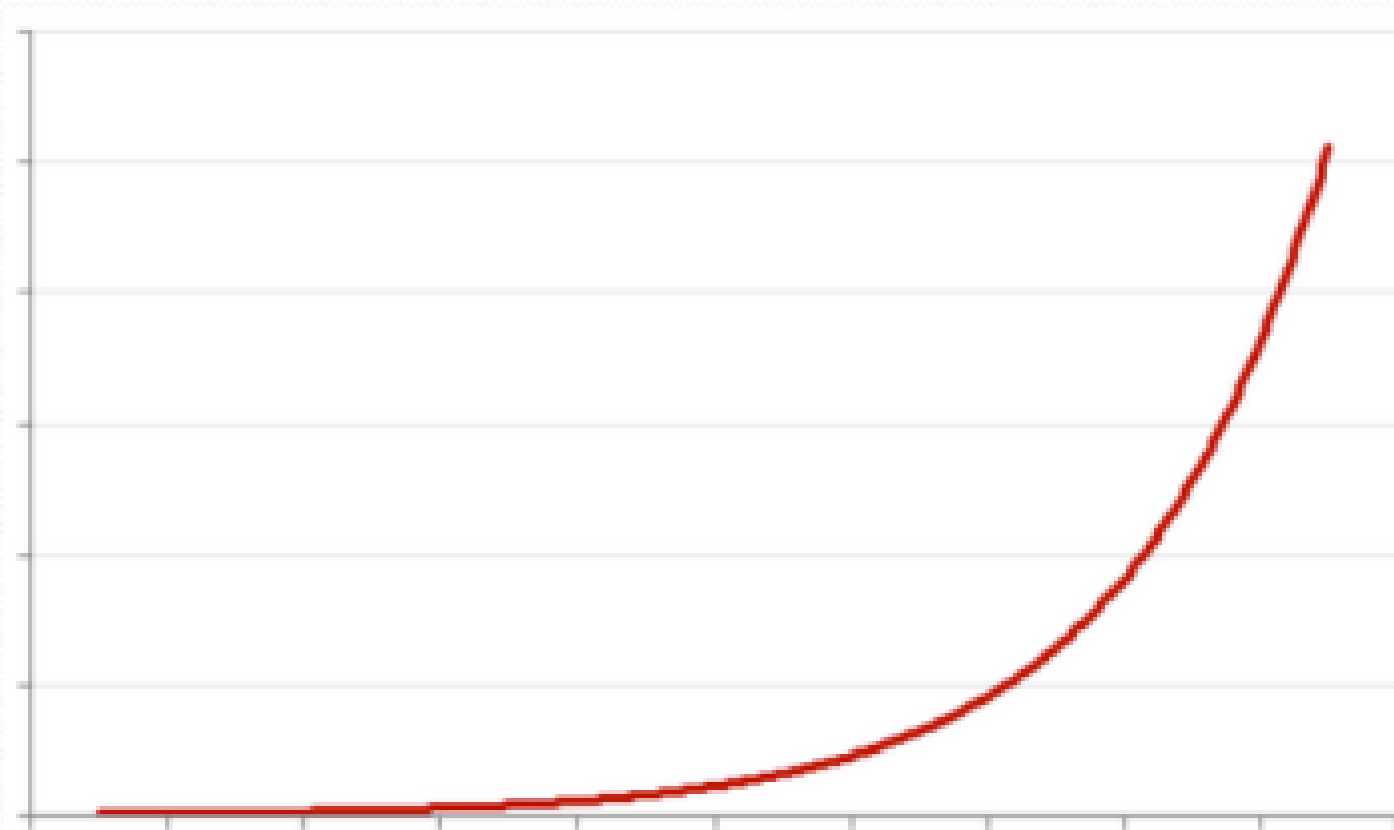
- Still none



**LIFE:**

**A sexually transmitted,  
100% fatal condition.**

# Graph:



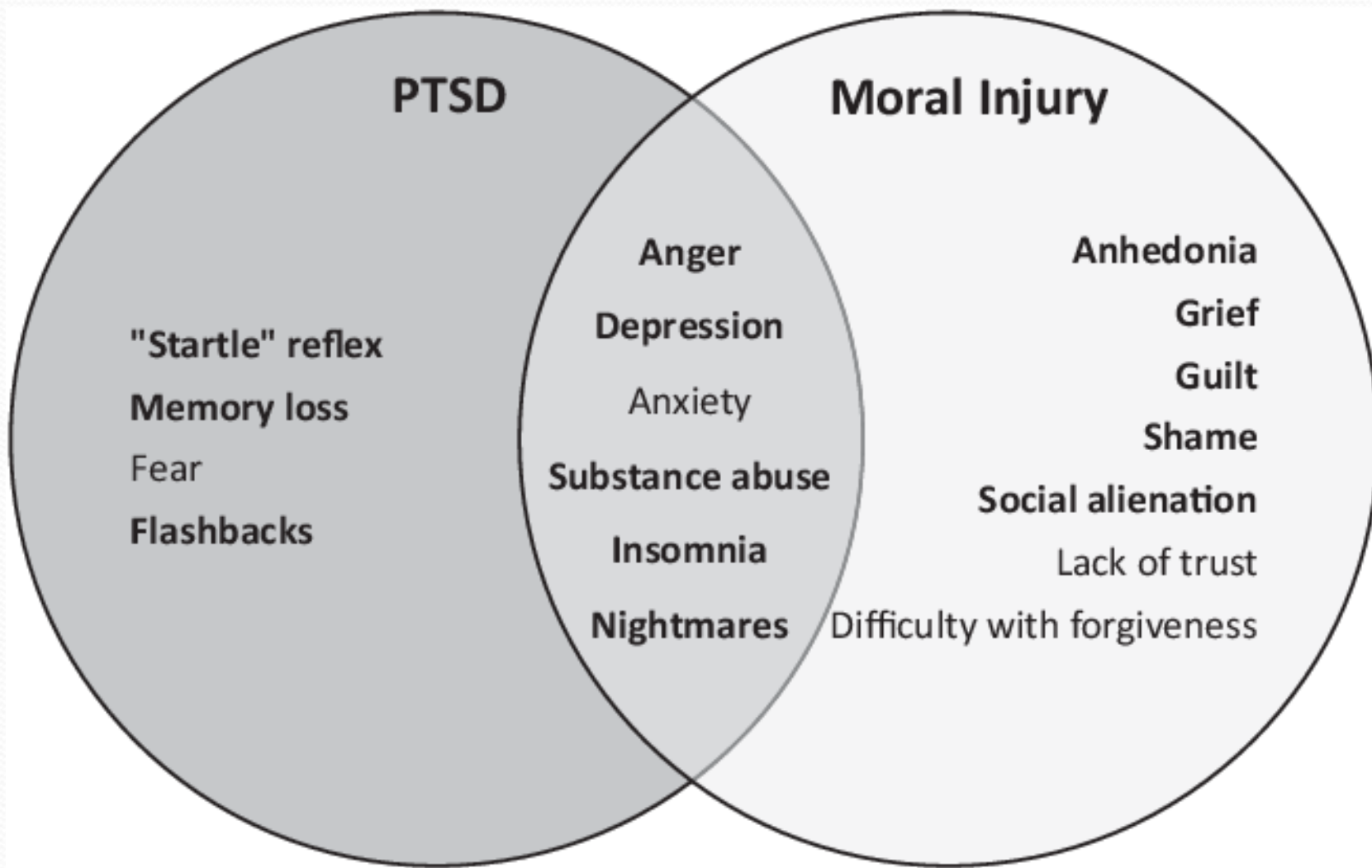
# Defn: **Personhood**

- The status of being a person.
- A personal awareness of your individual uniqueness.
- Possessing abilities and potential more or less unique to human beings (e.g. logical thought and reasoning).
- Possessing the ability to relate to other people (involving self-awareness and ability to communicate capacities).
- The state of awareness when things matter to you.
- The soul.
  - “The deeper reality is not that you have a soul but that, in your essential nature, you are a soul.” (Alan Morinis)

Brother Moral Elder Hospice Loving Leader Dogs Patient Nature  
Son Parachute Sailing PTSD Whales Trekkie  
Empathy Singing Whales Shenandoah  
Biochemistry Charitable Culture Director  
Injury SCUBA Physician Tractors Vermont  
Compassion Swimming Husband Pittsburgh Duke  
Adventurous Organist Peace Disease Reading Gentle  
Heart Boating CASHS Middle Science  
Flying Family Caring Church Music Sunset Protest  
Sunrise Palliate Biking Farmer Soul Pilot Friend  
Dad Travel Faith

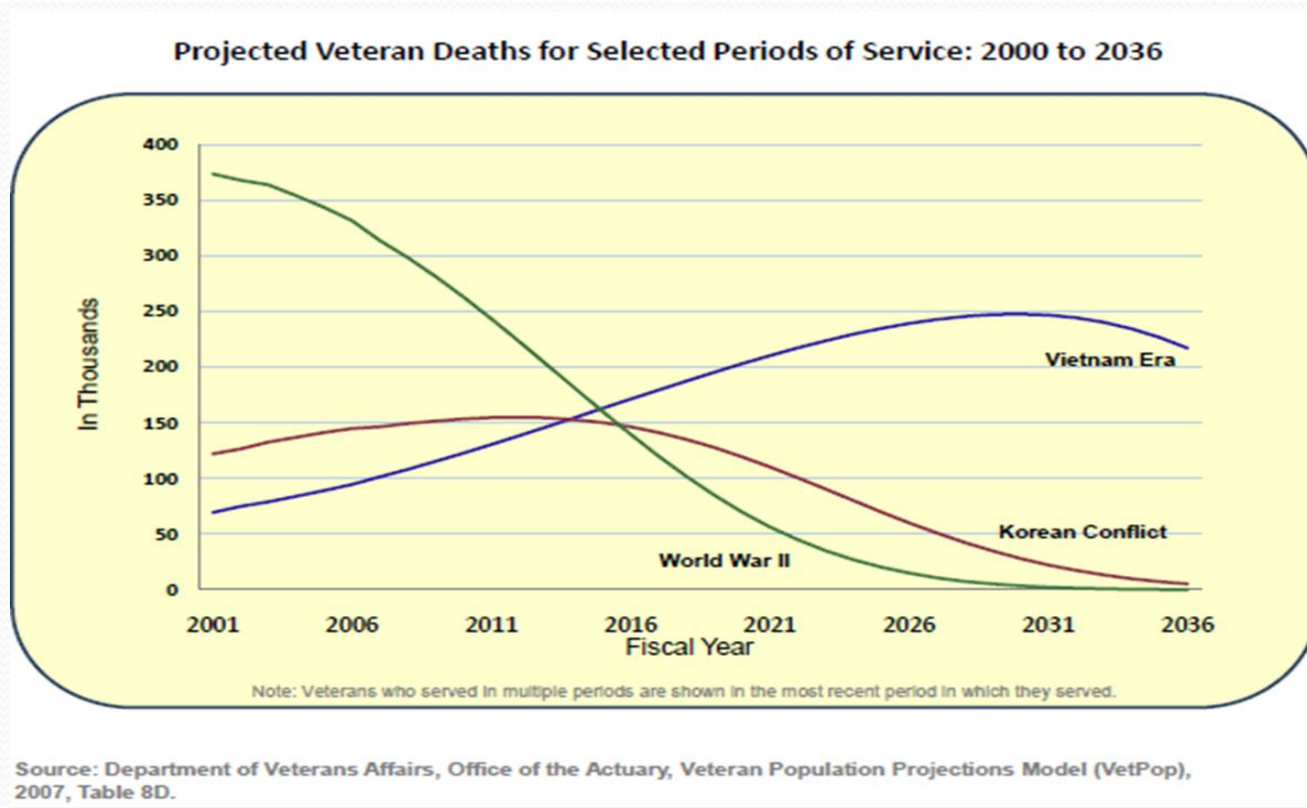
# Challenges to Our Personhood:

- Loss of control
- Loss of meaning
- Loss of safety
- Loss of identity
- Loss of self-determination
  
- Caused by extrinsic factors/pressures/events!





# Deaths among Vietnam-era Veterans are rising.



## Most Common Mental Health/Substance Abuse Conditions

| Condition                                | Vietnam War-Era<br>(n=45,860) | World War II-<br>Post-Korean War-Eras<br>(n=41,666) |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| Depression, %                            | 33.0                          | 23.5  |
| Anxiety, %                               | 18.4                          | 13.5  |
| Alcohol abuse, %                         | 24.0                          | 5.7   |
| Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), % | 16.5                          | 5.7   |
| Other mental health disorders, %         | 10.8                          | 9.2   |
| Drug abuse, %                            | 11.8                          | 2.0   |

Notes: All differences significant at p<0.001.

**March 30, 1990 - northern New York State**

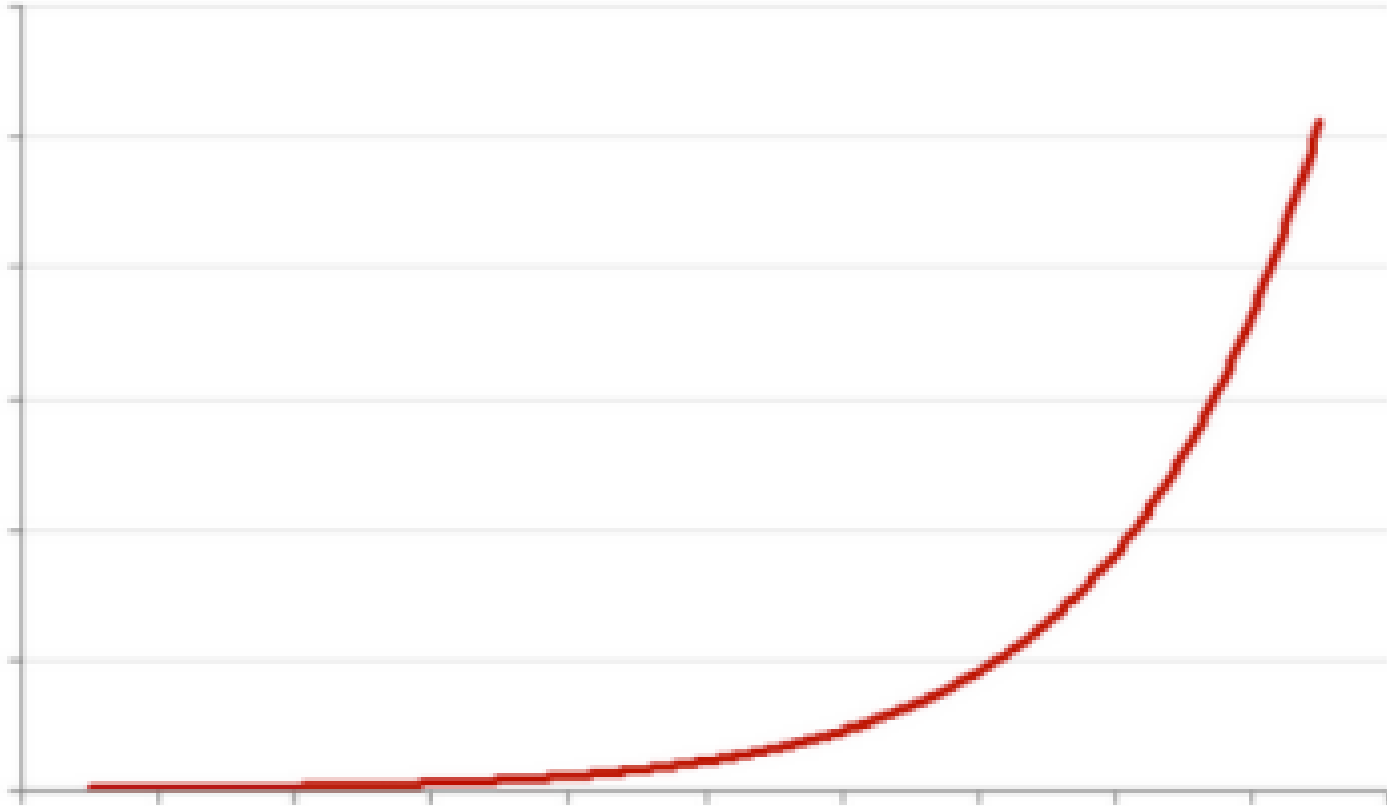


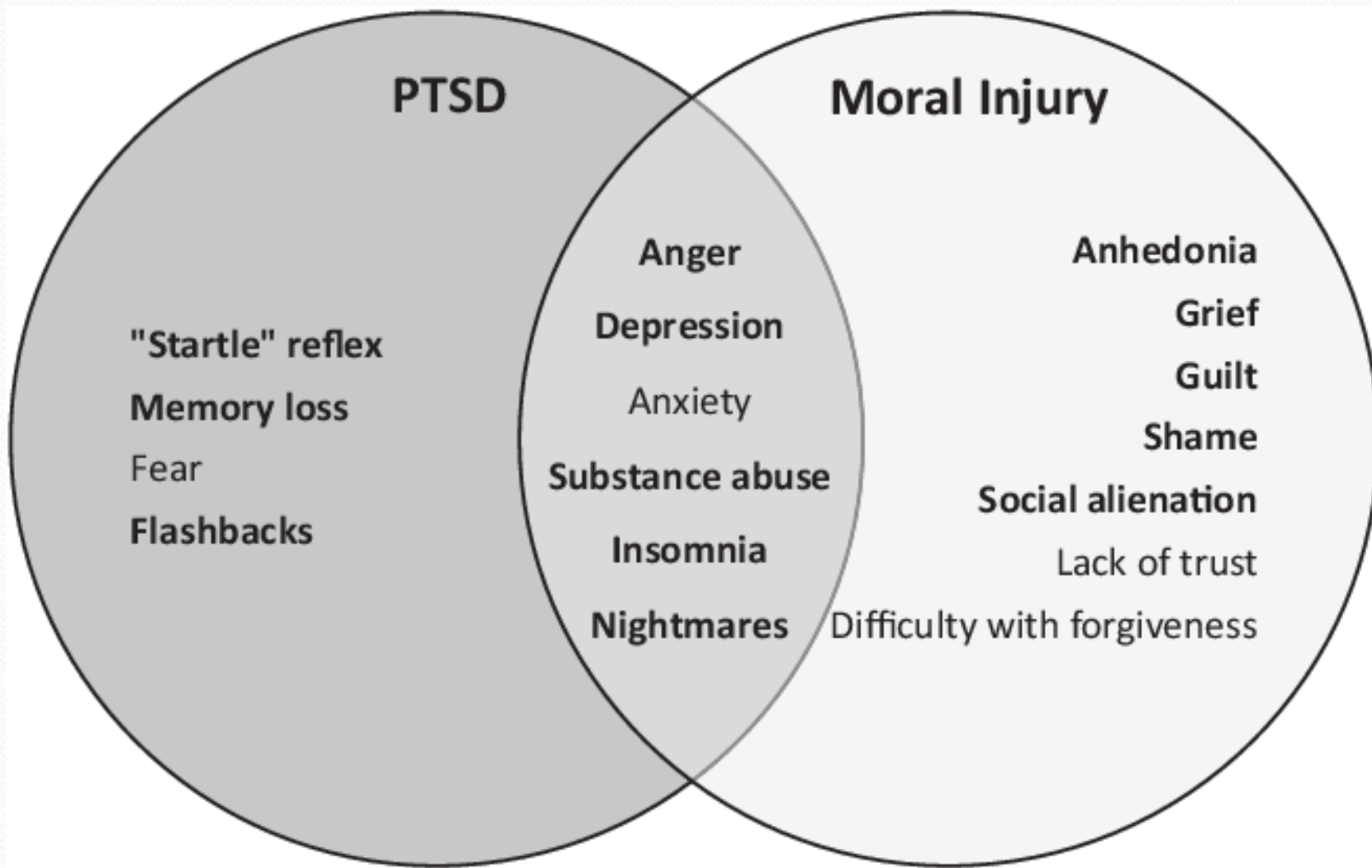
A word cloud on a black background featuring various terms. The most prominent word is 'PTSD' in large red letters. Other words include 'Veteran' (yellow), 'Nurse' (red), 'Helicopter' (purple), 'Patient' (blue), 'Physician' (blue), 'Victim' (red), 'Huey' (yellow), 'Mohawk' (blue), 'Angiogram' (green), 'Resident' (yellow), 'Ganienkeh' (red), 'Shooting' (red), 'Vietnam' (green), and 'Crash' (yellow).

Helicopter Veteran Nurse  
Patient PTSD Huey Mohawk  
Physician Victim Angiogram  
Resident Ganienkeh  
Shooting Vietnam Crash

# Graph:

Stress vs. “helicopter dreams”



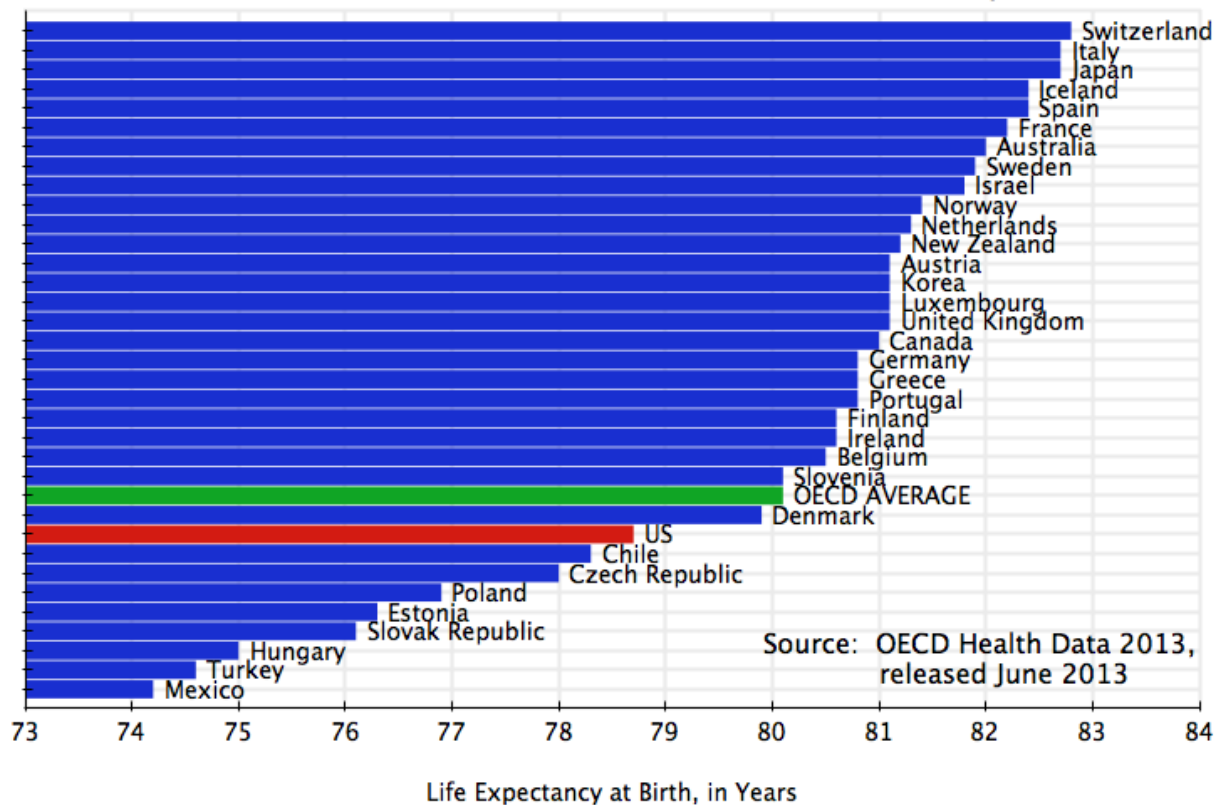


# Moral Injury in U.S. Health Care

BANG HEAD HERE



## Life Expectancy at Birth OECD Member Countries – 2011 or nearest available year

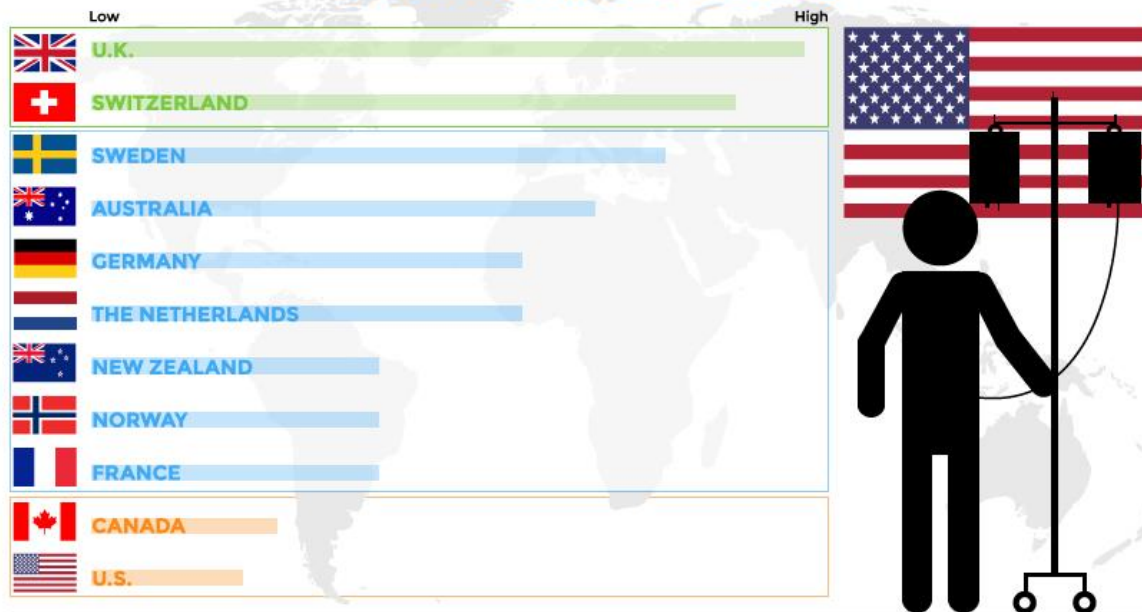




# U.S. HEALTH CARE RANKS LAST AMONG WEALTHY COUNTRIES

A recent international study compared 11 nations on health care quality, access, efficiency, and equity, as well as indicators of healthy lives such as infant mortality.

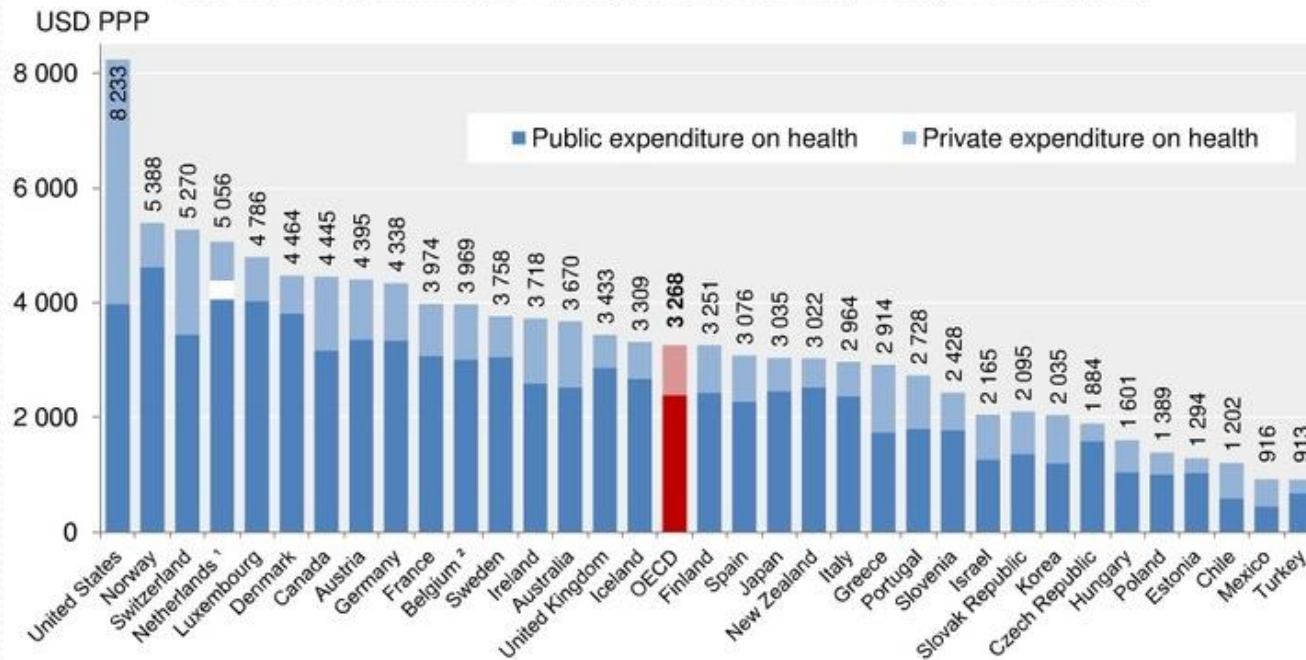
## Overall Health Care Ranking



Source: K. Davis, K. Stremikis, D. Squires, and C. Schoen, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: How the Performance of the U.S. Health Care System Compares Internationally, 2014 Update*, The Commonwealth Fund, June 2014.

## US spends two-and-a-half times the OECD average

Total health expenditure per capita, public and private, 2010 (or nearest year)



1. In the Netherlands, it is not possible to clearly distinguish the public and private share related to investments.

2. Total expenditure excluding investments.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

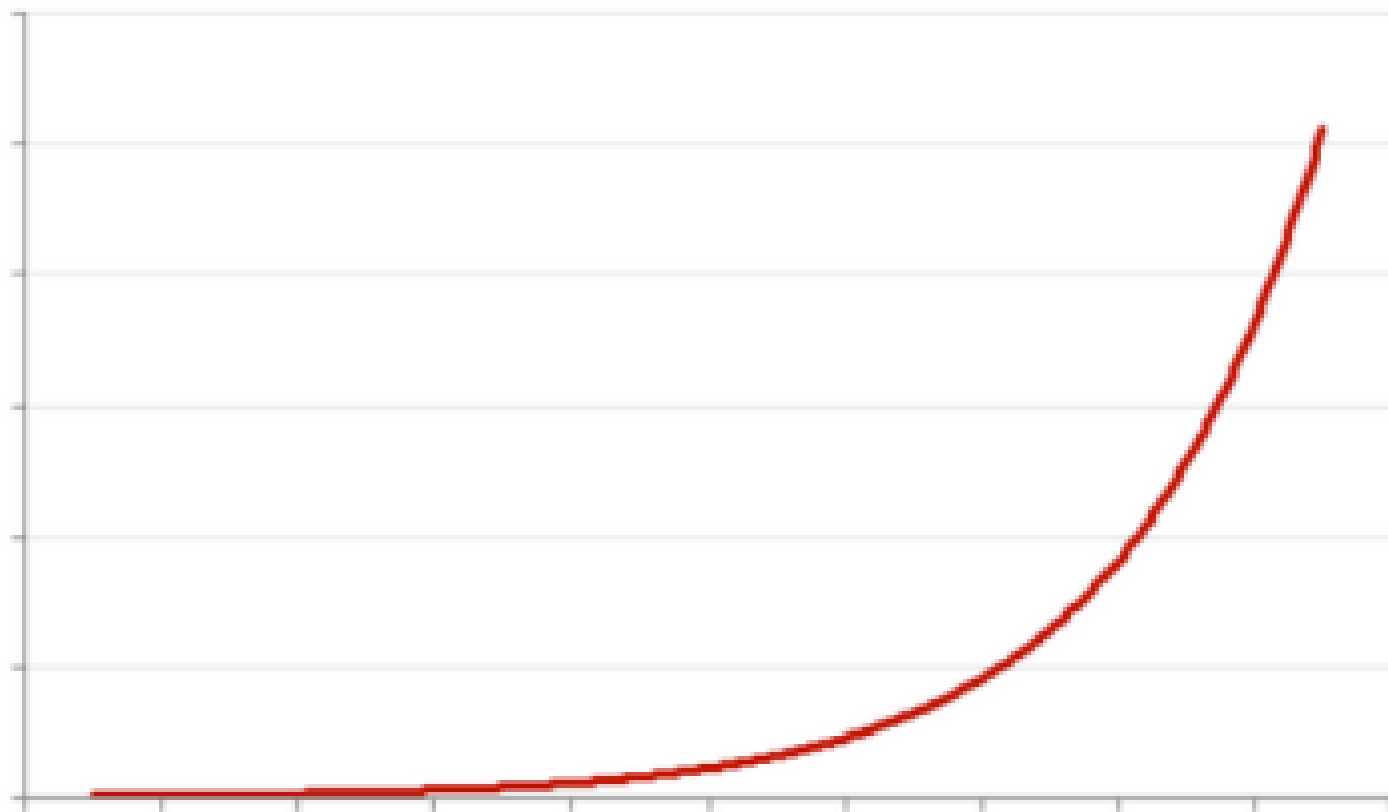
Source: OECD Health Data 2012.

# Time to leave practice.....

- “Any good provider, with adequate support, should not need to spend more than 8 minutes on any follow-up patient encounter.”
- Increasing regulations.
- Productivity pressures.
- Insurance companies.
- Computers / EMR's
- Lack of social supports.
- => Moral injury.

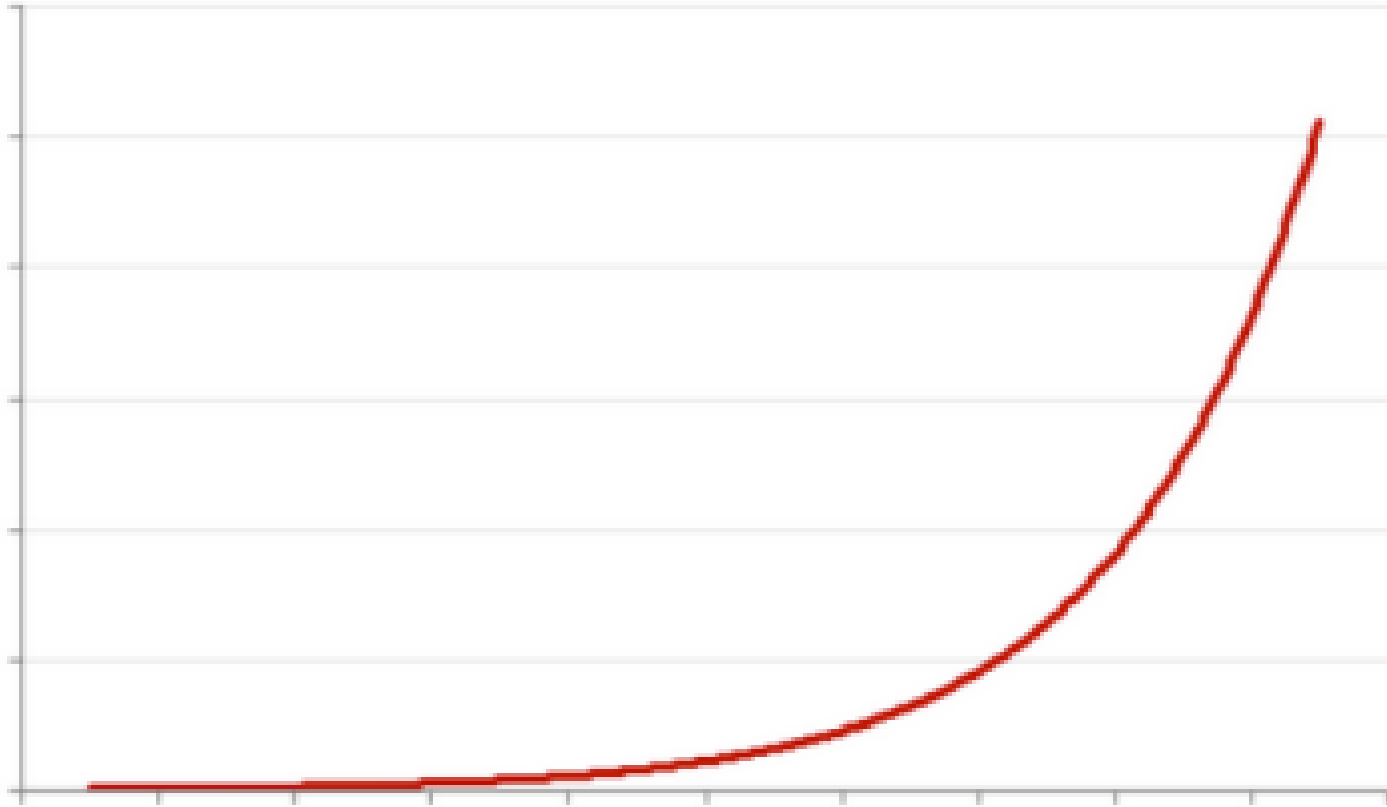
# Graph:

Rate of provider burnout vs. regulated tasks



# Graph:

Satisfaction vs. time spent with encounter

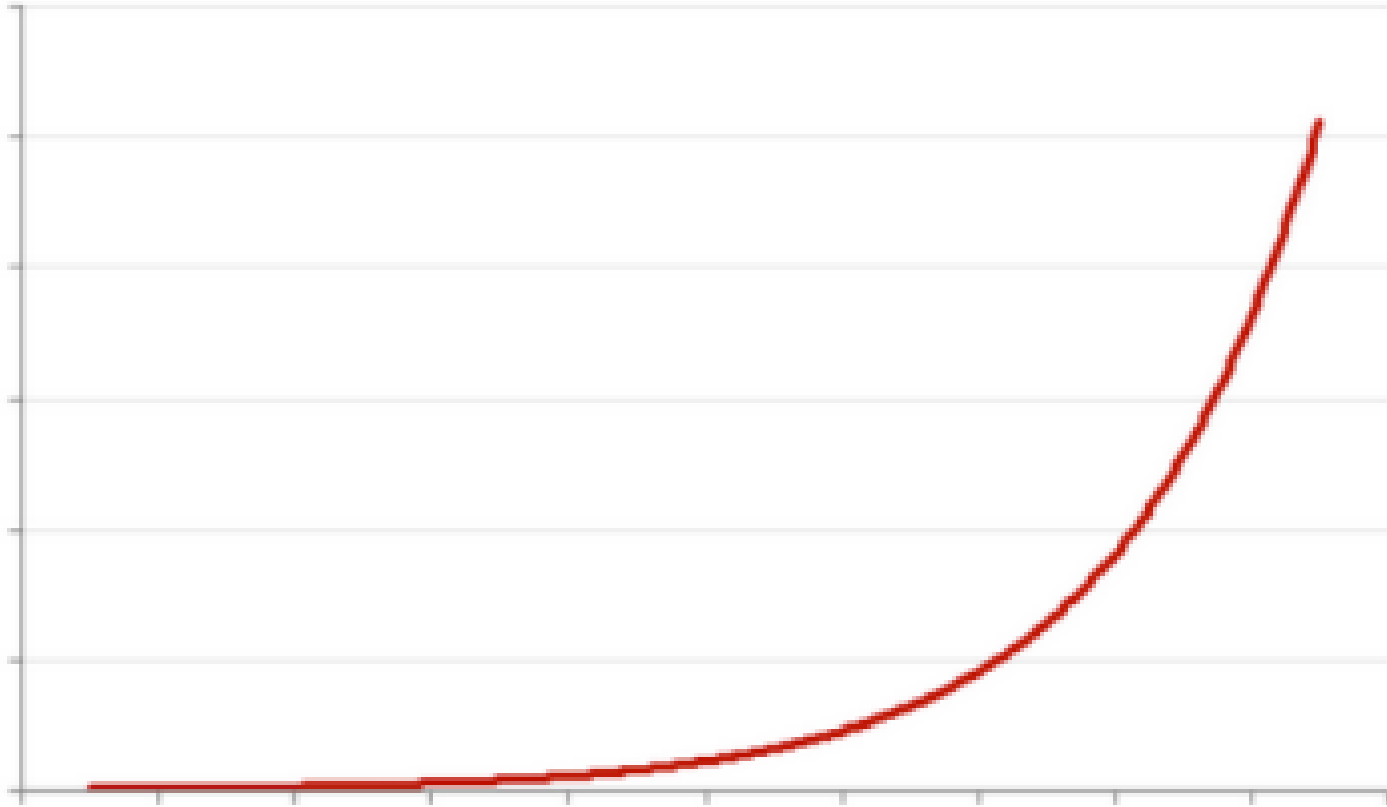


# Provider Identity: “Attending”

- Defn: attend
  - Latin *attendere*
    - to stretch to, to be with.
  
- Today, who is the attending?

# Graph:

## Satisfaction vs. Communication

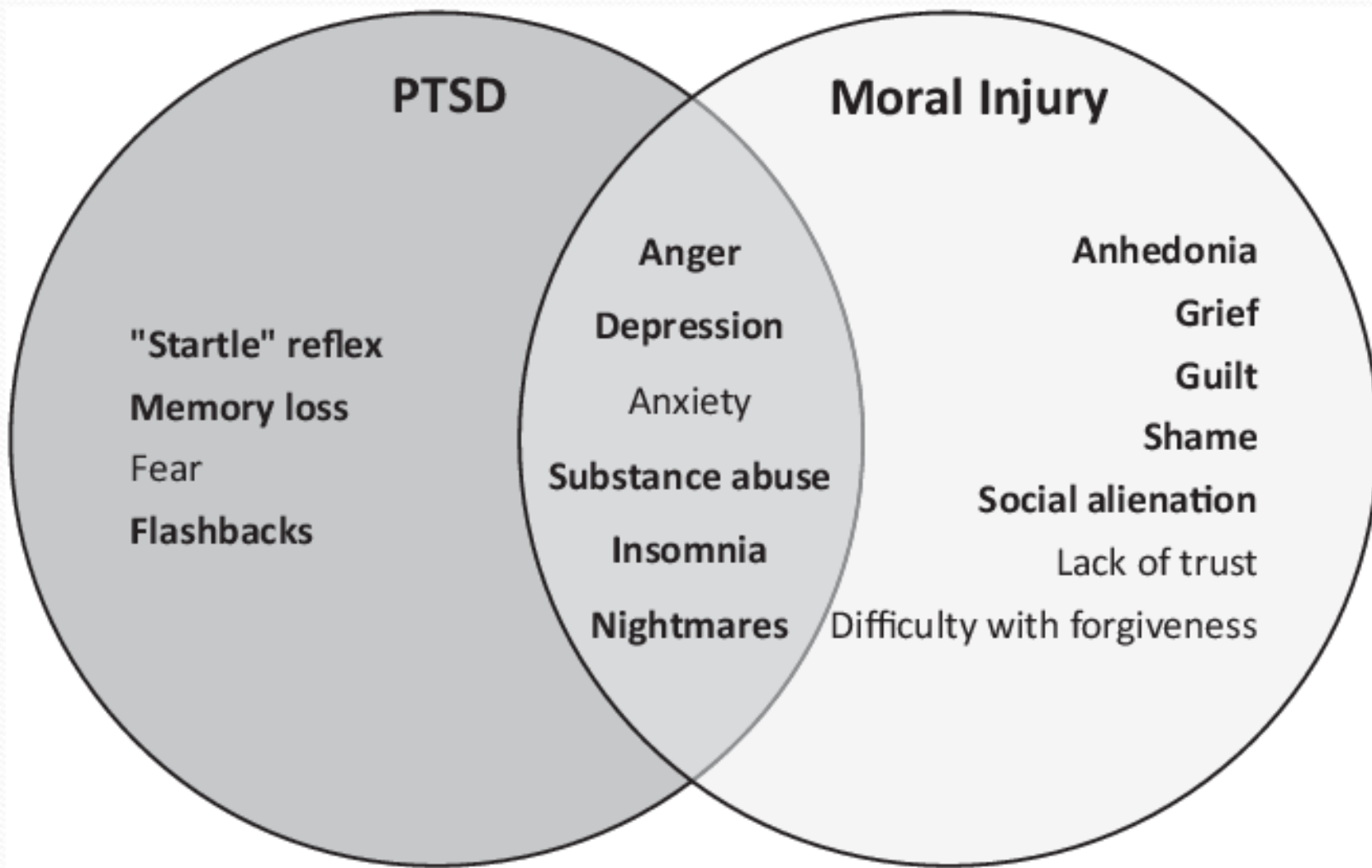


# Communication

- Verbal
  - High School Grad - 10-12,000 words
  - College Grad - 20-25,000 words
  - Health Care Professional - 40-50,000 words
- Body language
- Written
  - Screening for illiteracy
- Listening
  - Providers interrupt in 8-14 seconds



EMR  
Chart  
Coverage  
Prior  
Drugs  
Victim  
Family  
Regulations  
Productivity  
Cost  
Moral  
Injury  
Helplessness  
Deductible  
Authorization  
Physician  
Control  
BurnOut  
Patients  
Insurance  
Sleep  
Professionalism  
Frustration  
PTSD  
Audit



# How to promote personhood:

- **Be present.**
- **Active listening.**
- **Accept them.**
- **Remind them that they are a person of value.**
- **Help them find restoration.**
- **Listen to their fears and concerns.**
- **Direct help to them. Be an active team member.**
  
- **Be present. Listen.**


# How to promote personhood:

- Veterans need to understand that this guilt, shame and depression are NOT because they are “bad” or “immoral” people, but specifically because they are inherently good in a world that sometimes isn’t.
- Moral injury is a perfectly normal response to a perfectly abnormal situation.

# Repair the damage.....

- We are broken people working in a broken system trying to help other broken souls.
- The deeper reality is not that you have a soul but that, in your essential nature, you are a soul.

(Alan Morinis)



**Although the world is full of suffering,  
it is also full of the overcoming of it.**

Helen Keller  
*Optimism* 1903



**Comments?**

**Answers?**

