How to Detect and Treat Sleep Disorders in PTSD

Overview
✓ Insomnia, nightmares, and sleep apnea affect ~90% of patients with PTSD,¹ and are:
  a) Linked with a worse course of PTSD, alcohol use, and suicidality,² and
  b) Resistant to PTSD treatments and can even reduce their efficacy³
✓ Thus, sleep disturbances that co-occur with PTSD may require direct intervention⁴
✓ Behavioral sleep treatments are brief, effective, and reduce PTSD symptoms,⁵⁻⁹ and hence might be a workable first step for patients reluctant to initiate PTSD treatment

Insomnia
✓ Trouble falling and/or staying asleep, along with daytime dysfunction
✓ Insomnia may be maintained by a fear of sleep in some trauma patients¹⁰
✓ Screening Tool → 3- or 7-item Insomnia Severity Index¹¹,¹²
✓ First-Line Treatment → CBT for Insomnia (CBT-I)¹³
  o Multicomponent approach (sleep hygiene is not sufficient on its own¹⁴)
✓ Other Options → Self-Guided Insomnia Treatments
  o Improve Your Sleep – Free Self-Help Workbook
  o CBT-i Coach – Free App (use with face-to-face treatment or self-help workbook)
  o List of Other Web-Based Treatment Programs for Insomnia

Nightmares
✓ Vivid, disturbing dreams that cause awakenings, and may or may not replicate trauma
✓ Rarely reported and therefore often untreated¹⁵
✓ Screening Tool → 5-item Nightmare Disorder Index¹⁶
✓ First-Line Treatment → Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT)¹⁷,¹⁸
✓ Other Option → Exposure, Relaxation, and Rescripting Therapy (variation of IRT)¹⁷,¹⁹

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)
✓ Repeated collapse of airway during sleep that disrupts breathing and fragments sleep
✓ Most common type of sleep-disordered breathing, yet often undiagnosed and untreated
✓ Screening Tools → 4- or 8-item STOP-Bang,²⁰ or 10-item Berlin Questionnaire²¹
  o Objective sleep testing is needed for diagnosis (especially in vets with PTSD²²)
✓ First-Line Treatment → Positive airway pressure (PAP) therapy
  o PAP Desensitization is often necessary to improve adherence

Provider Training and Education Resources
✓ Free CBT-I Online Training – CBT1web (includes CBT for nightmares)
✓ 3-Day CBT-I Training – UPenn
✓ General Sleep Education – American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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