Surgeon's Corner

By Dr. Olav Opedal, psychologist, and VFW Post 683 Surgeon:

We are experiencing the shortest days of the year with the winter equinox nearing as I am writing this post. For some of us, the winter months may be extra hard, and sometimes the feeling of the blues can be caused by seasonal affective disorder, SAD. SAD is a condition where one feels sad or blue parts of the year, but not the entire year. The symptoms of SAD include low or sad mood, irritation, feelings of guilt and shame, problems with sleeping, memory problems or problems with attention, low motivation or feeling of low energy, poor appetite and sometimes thoughts of suicide/self-harm. If you have experienced these problems the last two years during this season while feeling normal the rest of the year. SAD can be diagnosed by a mental health professional. If you suffer from SAD, call the Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and press option one.

Are there treatments available for me?
Yes. Start with trying to get more sun and be active. Many also find light therapy helpful. According to Dr. Gonzales with the VA, the light source should provide 10,000 lux of light. Make sure you choose a light box that does not harm your eyes with harmful UV light. Make sure to consult with your doctor if you have glaucoma, cataracts, or eye damage from diabetes. If you use a light box, you should try to use it for 20 to 30 minutes after getting up in the morning. Unfortunately, most health insurance plans do not cover the cost. Other treatments include talk therapy and medication. Dr. Gonzales notes that there can be other causes for the symptoms found in SAD such as anemia, hyperthyroidism, diabetes, and infections.