

Military Family health medical group priority

Robert Mills
American Medical Association

ORLANDO, Fla. – As the nation honors its veterans, the American Medical Association honored the military recently at its semi-annual policy-making meeting by pledging to work to improve access to health care for active duty military personnel, reservists, veterans and their Families who rely on TRICARE, the military's health insurance program.

The action by the nation's largest physician organization was taken in response to concerns that TRICARE is straining to meet surging demand to provide quality health care, including mental health services.

At the same time, civilian physicians caring for TRICARE patients have been forced to make difficult decisions as government payment rates do not cover the cost of care and additional cuts are planned.

"Many physicians consider it a service to the country to care for military members and their Families, and as we celebrate Veterans Day it is critical to strengthen TRICARE so that physicians can continue to provide that care," said AMA board member Steven Stack, M.D. "More than nine million Americans are eligible for TRICARE, and physicians want to care for them, so let's ensure they can get the care they need."

Current concerns with TRICARE are likely to be exacerbated by the increasing demand for mental health services among beneficiaries. Roughly 300,000 U.S. military personnel have developed post-traumatic stress disorder or severe depression after being deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, increasing the need for health care services.

In addition, nearly 320,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan incur probable traumatic brain injury during deployment.

"The AMA will encourage TRICARE to strengthen and adequately support its network of mental health specialists to respond to increasing needs of our troops returning from Afghanistan and Iraq," said Stack.

"Increasing the availability of physicians can reduce wait times and close severe gaps in the access and delivery of mental health services for military personnel."

A growing proportion of veterans, military personnel and their Families are no longer predominately located near bases, where military clinics and hospitals are located.

Base closings and Families of active duty military who choose to live near their extended Families during long deployments both increase the reliance on civilian physicians.

The AMA is encouraging TRICARE to improve its physician education programs to facilitate increased participation and improve coordination of care.

"The last thing physicians want is for a military member on active duty to worry that a Family member back home is having trouble getting a doctor's appointment," said Stack. "The AMA will work to educate physicians on improvements to TRICARE that may make it easier for them to care for military Families, and work with the military to further improve the program."

Helping military spouses find employment

Suzanne Crosby
Employment Readiness Specialist

The Army Community Service Employment Readiness Program assists individuals in defining and reaching their career goals.

The sacrifices that our Families make are evident in the great number of Spouses who have interrupted their own careers to support their Soldiers.

The Employment Readiness Program seeks to strengthen Fort Gordon Families by offering employment guidance and job skill training.

Family members are encouraged to take advantage of the career counseling services offered at Darling Hall.

Whether you just need local employment information and resume assistance or career assessment, Employment Readiness will guide you through the process.

Individualized counseling is available daily to assist in developing a targeted plan for attaining career goals. Monthly workshops are offered that focus on job skill training. The Automated Resume Workshop is offered the first and fourth Wednesday of each month. Additional training for interviewing, dressing for success, salary negotiating and federal resume writing is offered on a rotating basis.

There is a strong desire on the part of Army Spouses to contribute to a greater quality of life for their Families.

The 2005 Survey of Army Families V, reports that 49% of Army Spouses are working and another 16% are unemployed and seeking jobs. Comparing the national unemployment rate of 6.5% to the 16% rate experienced by Army Families only hints at the scope of the problem.

Spouses are often frustrated by the lack of job opportunities near military installations as well as the poor prospect of career advancement caused by frequent moves.

The Army continues vigorously seeking new avenues to aid Family members in finding employment.

The Army Spouse Employment Partnership, the Army Spouse Career Assessment Tool and the www.MilitarySpouseJobSearch.org website are three specialized tools that have been developed by the Army to meet the growing need for Family member employment.

The Army Spouse Employment Partnership is an agreement of mutual benefit between the ACS Employment Program and national corporations.

Army Families provide a diverse and talented pool of workers and corporations structure special services to provide opportunities for Army Spouses and a superior workforce for themselves.

On the local level, Employment Readiness cultivates partnerships with employers in the Central Savannah River Area to develop job leads for clients and assists them in targeting the best employment opportunities. Currently, there are over 27 national and 15 local ASEP partners.

The Army Spouse Career Assessment Tool has four inventories to assess your skills, interests, values and personality. Inventory results suggest the types of jobs that one may want to consider in career planning.

The tool is located on the Army One Source website, aos.myarmylifetoo.com, and is free. One stop job searching can be found on the www.MilitarySpouseJobSearch.org website.

The search engine pulls jobs from the major job hunting websites and allows individual employers to register and post individual jobs. Local jobs appear on the site that will not be found through popular search engines.

The Employment Readiness Program is a critical support element in the Army's effort to enable readiness by providing the right service at the right cost. The service providers at the ERP office strive to improve Family Readiness by expanding job skill education and employment opportunities for the Fort Gordon Family members.

Ensuring quality children services strengthens Families

Mary Crowder
Child, Youth & School Services Division chief

The Army Family Covenant specifically notes Army Leadership's commitment to "ensuring excellence in schools, youth services, and child care."

Fort Gordon Child, Youth & School Services truly believes that the strength of our Soldiers comes from the strength of their Families.

When Soldiers are deployed we want them to be able to concentrate on their mission. The Army Family Covenant communicates Fort Gordon's CYSS commitment to provide the Army Family with a quality of life that honors the sacrifices our Soldiers and their Families make to protect American's Freedom.

This is what the Army Family Covenant has done for Fort Gordon Families through the Child, Youth & School Services.

DEPLOYMENT CYCLE SUPPORT

-- 2,418 hours of Respite Child & Youth Care in support of deployed Families for a savings to our patrons of \$8,269.

--4122 child and youth care hours provided in support of FRGs.

--124 hours of extended operations for CYSS Programs serving 679 children & youth.

Fee Reductions for Parents
-- 1,692 Families have received free CYSS registration for a savings to our patrons of \$30,456.

--CYSS has provided reduced fees for 489 Families for a savings to our patrons of \$12,004.

SUPPORT FOR WARRIORS IN TRANSITION

--WTs have been provided 274 hours of no-cost hourly care for respite and medical appointments.

--110 WT Families have utilized full time child care at a CAT 1 level saving our WT patrons \$6,303.95.

PARTNERSHIPS AND QUALITY PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

--All Fort Gordon CYSS programs (Child Development Center, Family Child Care Programs, School Age Services Programs) have received National Accreditation.

--All Fort Gordon CYSS programs have received Department of Defense Certification.

The Fort Gordon Youth Center is an affiliated member of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and the Department of Agriculture for 4-H.

CYSS School Liaison Officers were available to serve 3,340 children in two Georgia school districts. SLOs specifically touched 1,804 children through CYSS programming such as peer tutoring, KeyStone and Torch Club events, life skills and work force preparation, school transition, outreach services and mentoring. Over 154 personal contacts were made with parents or other adults in reference to schools and transitions.

As Fort Gordon continues to take care of military Families and through the funding of AFC, we will soon break ground on a 232 and 144 capacity Child Development Center, a 135 multi-functional Child Development Center and there are plans for a 150 capacity Middle School and Teen Center for our sixth- 12th grades.

As Fort Gordon continues to celebrate the Army Family Covenant, come and join the excitement and discounts for children and youth in our CYSS programs.

For more information on the benefits of CYSS, contact Mary Crowder, Child, Youth & School Services division chief.



Metro graphics photo

Wounded Warrior, Family say Fort Gordon gives great care

Charmain Z. Brackett
Correspondent

(Reprint from the Signal News Archive)

Prior to coming to Fort Gordon in February 2007, Sgt. Edmundo Rivera could describe his experience with trying to heal and wade through the maze of military red tape as nightmarish.

"We had to do everything. We did not know what an SFAC [Soldier and Family Assistance Center] was," said Rivera, whose journey to Fort Gordon began several years ago and who is a success story for Fort Gordon's Soldier and Family Assistance Center.

Rivera joined the Puerto

Rican National Guard 12 years ago because he wanted to serve his country.

He was activated with his unit and deployed to Iraq.

In October 2005, he was in a helicopter near Mosul when Iraqis fired on the craft. He was

hit by the bullets. The attack left him with a damaged left leg and spinal fracture.

After his injury, Rivera said he could have gone to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, but he was afraid the doctors would have amputated his leg. Instead he was assigned to Fort Drum, N.Y. and became a patient at a nearby civilian hospital.

Wanting his wife, Gisela, and son, Eli, by his side during his recovery, Rivera worked to bring them from Puerto Rico to New York.

His wife contacted the Puerto Rican National Guard.

"The National Guard did not want to assume responsibility," he said. "They said he has to be dead or practically dead."

"I felt horrible," said Gisela, through interpreter Renee Brent of Fort Gordon's SFAC staff. "The National Guard unit was saying they could do nothing because he was active duty."

Rivera said he accumulated about \$15,000 in debt during the year at Fort Drum, paying for plane tickets for his wife, paying for hotel rooms for her, buying a vehicle for her to drive to take him to his appointment and other expenses. The vehicle caught fire three days after he bought it. He put rental car expenses on a credit card.

He was assigned to World War II era barracks. Because of his injuries, he was unable to walk at first. The barracks had one bathroom, and it was down the hall.

Not only did he have physical injuries, but he was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder.

His wife would tell him how he would talk in his sleep and relive the day he was shot. He would be giving the orders of getting in the helicopter. She was afraid for her safety.

Their son, Eli, was about two years-old at the time. He was distressed by the situation and would not speak.

When the commander learned of what was taking place with Rivera, he made arrangements to have Rivera sent to Fort Gordon.

By that February, his wife was seven months pregnant, and his left leg was still in a brace.

The three of them drove from Fort Drum to Fort Gordon. They slept in the car during the trip.

When they arrived at Fort Gordon, they expected much of the same, but they were wrong.

"When we came through Gate 1 on February 19, 2007, it's the God honest truth, it was the first day we'd been

able to eat a warm meal," he said.

The generosity of those around him was overwhelming, he said. People gave him furniture, clothing and other necessities.

And when the SFAC opened at Fort Gordon, Rivera received additional assistance such as a grant, and he was approved for the Traumatic Servicemember Group Life Insurance.

Master Sgt. Ira Turner, who is part of the SFAC staff, helped him get approved despite being turned down three times.

The SFAC has helped in other ways. When Gisela needed surgery, Brent asked if they needed help with child care.

And their son, Eli, who is now 4, recently started speaking with the help of a speech therapist.

The Riveras will head back to their native Puerto Rico on Wednesday, and Brent has already called ahead to coordinate their son's speech therapy and help make sure Sgt. Rivera continues to receive good care.

What was once a nightmare has now been replaced with happier memories forged with people at Fort Gordon.

"I'm sad to leave," said Gisela.



Photo by Charmain Brackett

Sgt. Edmundo Rivera sits with his wife, Gisela, and son, Matthew, who was born in Georgia. Both Rivera and his wife praised the care provided to their Family while he was recuperating from combat injuries.