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WASHINGTON (Army News Service, Oct. 31, 2008) -- Beginning Nov. 5, the Army and its sister services will focus attention to one of the Defense Department's highest priorities – caring for wounded, ill and injured warriors.

As directed by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, November has been designated as "Warrior Care Month." Each branch of the U.S. Armed Forces has events planned during the month to highlight warrior care.

Since reports nearly two years ago that Soldiers recovering from war wounds were living in a substandard facility at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., the Army has transformed the way it structures and provides military health care to wounded and ill Soldiers, said Brig. Gen. Gary H. Cheek, Assistant Surgeon General for Warrior Care and Transition.

"We have made great strides in garnering more support and more resources for our wounded, ill and injured Soldiers," Cheek said. "Our key challenge is ensuring Soldiers and families are aware of the various programs and benefits we have to help them with the unique and personal issues each of them face."

The general said the month is more than a way for the Army and other services to show how far they have come in taking care of their own -- the activities and events during Warrior Care Month also make the programs the Army offers more visible to Soldiers who might need them.

"Warrior Care Month is a way to highlight these programs across the Army so our wounded warriors and their families know what's being done on their behalf, and how to take advantage of them," he said.

Cheek said Warrior Care Month is meant to provide a clear message to servicemembers and the public that caring for those who have sacrificed for America is one of the military's highest priorities.

The Army has unique activities planned throughout Warrior Care Month, which begins with the

Department of Defense kick-off event Nov. 5.

The Army's 36 Warrior Transition Units, in cooperation with military treatment facilities and installations across the Army will be conducting a variety of events and activities to help educate the force on wounded warrior resources, and to thank local communities and elected officials for their support.

On Nov. 17, designated as Army Service Day for warrior care, Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and the Army Surgeon General are scheduled to host a town hall meeting for Soldiers and families assigned to the Walter Reed Warrior Transition Unit.

Other events during the November observance include a visit by the Army chief of staff with Soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Nov. 2 and 11; Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Nov. 19; and Bethesda National Naval Medical Center Nov. 29 and 30.

Besides visits by officials to major military medical facilities, caregivers and recovering Soldiers alike will speak at various public venues about the state of care of wounded and ill Soldiers during Operation Tribute to Freedom events.

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