

Site helps troops, Families after deployment

Navy Lt. Jennifer Cragg, Defense Media Activity

Web site helps troops, Families adjust after deployments

WASHINGTON, Feb. 2, 2009 - A Military Health System Web site continues to help returning servicemembers and families adjust after a deployment ends, the site's program manager said Jan. 29.

About 20 percent of servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan experience adjustment difficulties such as stress, irritability and sleep problems, Dr. Robert Ciulla, program manager for afterdeployment.org, said on the "Dot Mil Docs" program on BlogTalkRadio.com.

The afterdeployment.org project is one of several core projects within the National Center for Telehealth and Technology, known as "T2," located at Fort Lewis, Wash., under the direction of Dr. Greg Gahm. T2 is a directorate of the Defense Department's Center for Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Ciulla noted that possible barriers to obtaining services, including a perceived stigma, stop many servicemembers from seeking out care. Ciulla emphasized that online resources have many advantages.

"Users can log on to afterdeployment.org in the privacy and comfort of their own homes and work with the site's resources anonymously. This should help with concerns about stigma," he said.

Ciulla said that logging on to afterdeployment.org "means that users don't have to worry about transportation, or scheduling appointments, or arranging a sitter for the kids." He added that online tools have other advantages, including 24/7 access anywhere an Internet connection is available.

Afterdeployment.org was officially launched in August, and is designed to provide behavioral health tools to servicemembers, their families and veterans in all the service branches, Ciulla said. It includes exercises and tools that the entire family can use.

"All of the materials on the site have value to families ... the main exercises and tools on the site -- such as stress and anger management, sleep hygiene, getting balance in one's life -- all of these tools are as relevant for a spouse or other family member as they are for someone on active duty just returning from deployment," he said. "We consider the self-help workshops, modeled after actual therapy

sessions and which include exercises and vignettes and self-assessments, to be the site's signature elements."

Ciulla said the self-care tools available on afterdeployment.org provide the entire military community with vital service-delivery options. He noted that the site has particular advantages for National Guard and reserve units, who may be distant from a military treatment facility or otherwise located in areas lacking providers who are knowledgeable about military-related adjustment concerns.

Ciulla added that officials are working on future workshops on topics such as traumatic brain injury and resilience training. He also said he and others in the project office have "listened to the feedback we have received over the past months."

"In addition to TBI and resilience training," he said, "we'll be targeting content in a number of areas, including domestic and partner issues, and veterans' issues and women's issues, to name a few."

Additionally, Ciulla said, military leaders and health care providers can tap the site's materials to learn about common problems and change strategies, and to obtain useful contact information concerning local resources.

Currently, afterdeployment.org offers 12 programs: Adjusting to War Memories, Dealing with Depression, Handling Stress, Improving Relationships, Succeeding at Work, Overcoming Anger, Sleeping Better, Controlling Alcohol and Drugs, Helping Kids Deal with Deployment, Seeking Spiritual Fitness, Living with Physical Injuries and Balancing Your Life.