

APFRI NCO stays busy, upholds standards

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Sgt. 1st Class Ponce Shepard, NCOIC for all three Army Physical Fitness Research Institute annexes, give Sgt. Radesha Dantzler some tips on working out, and finding the maximum weight she can lift. Photo by Spc. Jennifer Rick.

March 26, 2009 -- From coordinating behind-the-scene details that make operation at the Army Physical Fitness Research Institute possible to helping execute detailed health assessments, APFRI's noncommissioned officer-in-charge, has a hand in almost everything.

"I'm in charge of safety and security, maintenance and I have a hand in budgeting," 14-year Army veteran **Sgt. 1st Class Ponce Shepard** said. "But the biggest thing we do here is the assessments."

Each year, more than 600 students pass through the gates of Carlisle Barracks, and each one is encouraged to participate in an APFRI health assessment. The assessments focus on a person's strengths and weaknesses, how healthy they are and if they are at risk for problems such as heart disease.

The assessment starts with having blood work done to show us the person's levels are for lipids, proteins and other factors, Shepard explained.

Then, when they come in, we ask them a lot of questions about their family medical history, their exercising habits and other things. They get their blood pressure taken, and then go to the "Bod Pod".

The Bod Pod is a machine that measures a person's percentage of body fat through air displacement. While it seems daunting to some, it is important to know exactly how much muscle mass and body fat a person has to accurately predict any health issues that may arise, Shepard said.

After sitting in the Bod Pod, the participant hits the treadmill to test endurance, heart strength and lung capacity.

"They are pushed during this phase," Shepard said. "That way, if there is something wrong in their heart or it's not working as well as it should, we will see it."

Strength and flexibility is tested next, and then they describe their eating habits.

Once all testing is done, a member of the APFRI fitness team sits down with the participant and discusses their health level, problems or potential problems and gives guidelines and advice on living healthier. They will talk in detail about the best way to gain or lose weight, exercise and avoid injuries.

Resident students' spouses, distance education students and senior service fellows are also encouraged to have an APFRI assessment done.

"My role is mostly with the Bod Pod and the other physical parts of the assessment," said Shepard, who is a physical therapy technician.

Besides working here at Carlisle, Shepard is also the NCOIC of the other two APFRI annexes at the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., and the Sergeants Major Academy at Ft. Bliss, Texas. He regularly visits and spends time working at each site.

Shepard enjoys his work and finds it rewarding.

"What we do for our customers really has a positive influence on their lives," he said. "Sometimes they will come back and tell us how much we helped them, and that's a good feeling."

Lt. Col. Stephen Barone, APFRI deputy director, sees Shepard's motivation and dedication.

"He has a very good work ethic and understanding of how NCOs support the organization. He enforces that standards for the organization and does a very good job."