Web site helps troops, families adjust after deployments

By Lt. Jennifer Cragg, Defense Media Activity

A Military Health System Web site continues to help returning service members and families adjust after a deployment ends, the site's program manager said Jan. 29.

"About 20 percent of service members 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.

Afterdeployment.org was officially launched last August, and is designed to provide behavioral health tools to service members, their families and veterans in all the service branches. It includes exercises and tools that the entire family can use.
Image courtesy of www.afterdeployment.org

Ciulla noted that possible barriers to obtaining services, including a perceived stigma, stop many service members 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 service members, 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 (TBI) 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, 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," Ciulla said.

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.

Father on Okinawa honors fallen son, joins Navy Medical Corps

By Cpl. Andrew Avitt,
Marine Corps Bases Japan

He thought it was a prank when he received a message on his answering machine from the White House. Later that month Bill Krissoff, a 60-year-old orthopedic surgeon from Truckee, Calif., his wife Christine and his son, 1st Lt. Austin Krissoff, were face-to-face with the president.

Surrounded by the families of fallen service members, President George W. Bush asked if there was anything he could do to soothe the loss of their son, 1st Lt. Nathan Krissoff.

Nathan died in Iraq from injuries suffered after a roadside bomb exploded December 2006.

"Yes Mr. President," Krissoff replied. "I want to join the Navy Medical Corps, but they told me I'm too old."

At 60 years old, 19 years over the enlistment age limit, Krissoff needed waivers to enlist.

"The recruiter told me that it would take up to a year," he said, adding that even then his chances didn't look good.

After his meeting with the president, Krissoff got his waiver in two days.

Krissoff had set his sights on joining the military several months before meeting with the president.

"Fathers usually inspire their sons, I was inspired by both of my sons," he said. Though one can only imagine the kind of reactions he got for aspiring to serve at his age. Krissoff said he was determined. Even Austin was skeptical at first, he said.

He closed his orthopedic practice in Truckee that year and was commissioned as an officer in the Navy Reserve in November.

"After my commission I got a card from my son, it said 'welcome to the fight,'" Krissoff said with a smile. "He certainly has come around."

Now, Lt. Cmdr. Krissoff said he enjoys practicing medicine in the military and prefers it to his civilian practice.

"In military medicine you are functioning as a team, taking care of each other. You aren't worried whether he has insurance or about hospital politics," he said.

He is currently enrolled in the pre-deployment training program at 4th Marines Regimental Training Schools at Camp Schwab, Okinawa. He is slated to augment Combat Logistics Battalion 4, 3rd Marine Logistics Group, on their upcoming deployment to Iraq.

Lt. Cmdr. Bill Krissoff, 60, joined the Navy Medical Corps after his son, 1st Lt. Nathan Krissoff, died in Iraq.
Photo by Lance Cpl. Thomas W. Provost

"I didn't want to work in another brick building, I wanted to deploy," Krissoff said, explaining his desired role in green-side medicine. "I wanted to do operational medicine; to be a surgeon of Marines."