

Darnall's excellent staff and services ensure positive behavioral health experiences for Soldiers and their Families

By Patricia Deal
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Taking care of and supporting military families is a national necessity, as outlined in the 2011 Presidential report, Strengthening Our Military Families.

The initiative's number one priority, "enhancing the overall well-being and psychological health of the military family" is right on target with Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's mission, according to the hospital commander, Col. Patrick Sargent.

"The nation has an obligation to take care of those who have given so much," he stated. "The hospital's mission to provide 'Compassionate, World-Class Healthcare — One Patient at a Time,' demonstrates our commitment to the brave Warriors and their families."

When it comes to the behavioral health of Soldiers and their families, Sargent stated, Darnall's behavioral health department's primary focus is to help Soldiers recover and rebuild their resiliency.

"We offer a wide range of services to help Soldiers and family members with all their behavioral health issues," he said. "But more than just having a quantity of services and providers, we offer the highest quality behavioral health care. We use evidence-based treatments proven to be the most successful, and we are on the leading edge of major research projects that will help shape future best-practices in treating Soldiers with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury)."

Quality is defined as "a measure of whether services increase the likelihood of desired mental health outcomes for the patient" and Lt. Col Sharette Gray, chief of CRDAMC's Behavioral Health department, states the department has already achieved, and continues to achieve, thousands of positive outcomes and successes with patients.

Gray attributes the department's success to the staff, who she said are uniquely qualified and committed to helping Soldiers and their family members heal.

"All of our providers are licensed practitioners in their field, and 84 percent of our psychiatrists are board certified, which is outstanding for any hospital. Many of our providers have earned high accolades from their peers and have been instrumental in bringing specialized services or initiating innovative approaches to care at CRDAMC," Gray said, adding that all of the support staff is also skilled at providing confidential and concerned customer service to patients.

"Darnall has the advantage over the behavioral health care available in some civilian communities. Our providers understand the military culture and the unique challenges our Soldiers and their families face. They all have made a conscious choice to come to Fort Hood specifically to help Soldiers," she added. "We have active duty members. Some have prior

military experience or come from a military background. Many have left private practices and facilities to work here. Many providers, military and civilian, have deployment experience.”

One psychiatrist not only has deployment experience, he also has familiarity with Fort Hood Soldiers as he previously served as the 1st Cavalry Division psychiatrist.

Now a civilian, Dr. Adam Borah said he continued working for the military because he likes its approach to behavioral health care.

“While I’m required to perform standards of care through evidence-based treatment, it’s not the typical ‘check the box’ care. I’m able to practice as I see fit, tailoring each treatment plan to meet the individual’s needs. I have a variety of tools and resources at my disposal to further enhance treatment,” he said. “We practice the best treatments available and we also help lead the field as to what will work better in the future.”

A psychologist from the Warrior Combat Stress Reset Program said she finds the military’s approach to behavioral healthcare a perfect fit. A PTSD survivor herself, Dr. Janice Whitacre has worked in private practice for 30 years, specializing in PTSD and related trauma.

“In addition to treating civilians, I also consulted at Vet centers to help Vietnam and Gulf War veterans cope with their PTSD issues. I felt I could help the Soldiers and veterans today as they must deal with prolonged, intense trauma from multiple deployments,” she said. Whitacre has worked at the Reset Center since its conception and added she’s pleased with how it continues to grow and evolve. “My desire is to help these brave Soldiers get some relief as soon as possible so they get on with their healing process and experience joy and pleasure again.”

Doctor Timothy Ingram, psychologist at the Resilience and Restoration Center, is also pleased with the strides Army behavioral healthcare is making to help Soldiers cope with their behavioral health issues.

“Soldiers face risk every day—risk to their life, their well-being, their family. They deserve nothing but quality care to help them heal, and the quality of care offered here is without doubt the best available,” Ingram said. “Our staff is highly qualified and skilled, but more importantly, they are motivated to help Soldiers as their way of giving back.”

Ingram was in private practice when 9/11 hit and his patriotic spirit spurred him to take a deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan to help state department security forces trainers. “I was in the heat of things, working in the red zone the entire time. Despite being in car bomb explosions, RPG attacks and surviving suicide bombers, I stayed there for over two years,” he added. “Afterwards, I saw that my personal experiences and expertise could benefit Soldiers so I came to Fort Hood to continue to serve my country.”

As a former Soldier and now military spouse, Esmeralda Cordova knows the stresses and challenges of military life. After her personal experiences with TBI, Cordova chose to work at the TBI clinic performing neuropsychological testing as her way of helping Soldiers. “Anything I

can do, even if it's just as simple as making Soldiers feel comfortable about coming to the clinic, can make a difference," she said.

The many research projects underway at Fort Hood are also making a difference in Soldiers' lives as they are helping determine the latest, most effective treatment plans available to help Soldiers with TBI, PTSD and other behavioral health issues.

One research group, the South Texas Research Organizational Network Guiding Studies on Trauma and Resilience (STRONG STAR) is the largest research consortium developed or funded by the Department of Defense for combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder. STRONG STAR is conducting seven of the consortium's 16 research studies at Fort Hood. Two studies are evaluating the effectiveness of the leading evidence-based psychological treatments for PTSD (Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy).

The national initiative and CRDAMC vision to provide world-class healthcare to Soldiers and their families is also shared by Humana Military Healthcare Services and TRICARE.

Humana Military states on its website that its main objective is "to ensure TRICARE beneficiaries have access to qualified providers, an appropriate number of choices, and a diverse range of specialists to provide the full scope of health care services." Providers must meet specific criteria and prerequisites to determine initial and ongoing participation in the network, "ensuring a robust and quality network."

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Arlene Stoddard, Marriage and Family counselor with the CRDAMC Department of Social Work, greets a couple before their appointment. Stoddard is one of the many quality CRDAMC behavioral health professionals with military ties who made a conscious commitment to help Soldiers. (U.S. Army photo by Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs)



Doctor Timothy Ingram, psychologist at the CRDAMC Resilience and Restoration Center, helps a patient with progressive relaxation therapy to help deal with stress and anxiety. Ingram is one of the many quality CRDAMC behavioral health professionals with military ties who made a conscious commitment to help Soldiers. (U.S. Army photo by Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs)