Ms. Sharyn Saunders

Recently, I attended the Department of Defense and Department of Veteran Affairs’ Suicide Prevention Conference in Denver, Colorado, and the theme was “Be There – It Takes a Community.” With more than 1,000 participants, the conference brought together members of the military community, dedicated to improving the well-being of our service members, veterans and their families.

In the Army, the uncertainty and stress of military life has, and will continue to have, an effect on the mental and physical state of our Soldiers. Therefore, it is everyone’s duty and obligation to sustain their personal readiness, build connections and engage when they notice a change in a fellow Soldier’s regular behavior. Strengthening Soldiers and enhancing resilience is not a seasonal endeavor, but a daily effort and a top priority for the Army.

As Lt. Gen. Thomas C. Seamands, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, and keynote speaker said, “We realize there are no simple answers or solutions, and we must take and make every opportunity to do more.” I couldn’t agree with this more. Our job at Ready and Resilient is to provide the Army with a proactive preventive strategy to strengthen Soldiers. And a significant part of that is training Soldiers to build resilience and performance skills.

“Strengthening Soldiers and enhancing resilience is not a seasonal endeavor, but a daily effort and a top priority for the Army.”

At the conference, we had the opportunity to share how our R2 Performance Experts have been engaged in teaching performance and resilience skills to Soldiers, family members and DA civilians for more than seven years. This training focuses on increasing awareness of how the mind affects behaviors and teaches mental skills that can be used by both the individual and coached to others. By focusing on the individuals’ abilities rather than their limitations, performance and resilience training helps them build the confidence and optimism, which are essential competencies to have when dealing with any challenge and facing adversity.

We know that when these skills are made a part of their daily lives, it results in enhanced resilience, optimized performance and sustained personal readiness. Resilient Soldiers perform better, improve unit readiness and enjoy a greater quality of life.

We are all valued members of the Army team and critical to readiness and mission accomplishment. We must be proactive in developing self-awareness and strengthening relationships with each other. We must foster a culture where individuals are motivated to seek help for themselves or others when needed, without the fear of stigma. We must be there for one another. One suicide is one too many.

Live resilient, stay ready, and take action!
Army Resiliency Directorate Demonstrates New Trust Based Skill at DoD/VA Conference

ARD Strategic Communications

The 2017 Department of Defense and Department of Veteran Affairs Suicide Prevention Conference presented an opportunity for the Army Resiliency Directorate-Directorate of Curriculum to introduce and demonstrate the new Engage skill. Attendees consisted of Soldiers, Suicide Program Prevention Managers, Performance Experts (PE), and other Army support personnel. PE Megan Helf and Curriculum Developer Shannon Baird, Ph.D. led participants in a session which introduced a portion of the Engage skill as will be conducted by Performance Experts.

Engage is a scientifically-validated Army professional skill designed to emphasize Soldiers’ duty and obligation to engage when alerted to a deviation from the norm or standard. “As a skill, Engage is intended to increase the likelihood that members of the Army community will engage in any situation where someone is in need of help,” Baird explained. “Through this engagement, Soldiers, family members, DA civilians and contractors are able to change the trajectory or outcome of that situation and foster a culture of trust.”

Throughout the week, PEs, Performance Center Managers, and ARD leadership networked with other conference attendees and explained the capabilities of R2 training and R2 Performance Centers, such as providing education and resources to help Soldiers in times of need. R2 Training Branch Chief Casey Olson and ARD Training and Operations Division Chief Col. Gregory Stokes led a panel consisting of Jon Metzler, Ph.D., and Jonathan Carter from the ARD Directorate of Curriculum alongside research psychologists Toby Elliman, Ph.D., and Susannah Knust, Ph.D., from the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research-Research Transition Office to discuss ARD’s prevention efforts.

Olson and Stokes fielded questions about the rewriting of Army Regulation 600-63 Army Health Promotion and Army Regulation 350-1 Army Training and Leader Development, and how, in the future, requirements will move from completing mandatory training hours to measuring performance outcomes. The goal of rewriting the Army regulations is to empower commanders to choose the training that is most relevant for their units using targeted actions. This will allow commanders to tailor their training to strengthen Soldiers without being limited by hourly training requirements.

Performance Expert Megan Helf leading Engage Training at the 2017 DOD/VA Suicide Prevention Conference.
Photo: Darrell Hudson, U.S. Army

R2 Training Branch Chief Casey Olson and Col. Gregory Stokes leading ARD Prevention panel at the 2017 DOD/VA Suicide Prevention Conference.
Photo: Darrell Hudson, U.S. Army
Team Army Athletes Embody Resilience, Achieve Greatness at 2017 DoD Warrior Games

ARD Strategic Communications

A seated discus throwing is not where you typically expect a couple dozen spectators to drop into the front leaning rest position and enthusiastically knock out push-ups. However, when Sgt. David Crook, Team Army athlete at the 2017 Department of Defense (DoD) Warrior Games, hurled a discus into the bleachers — beyond the far end of the throwing pit, that is exactly what happened.

Crook is one of 39 Army Soldiers and Veterans who comprised Team Army for the 2017 DoD Warrior Games. He, Team Army, and the rest of the Warrior Games competitors already overcame obstacles involving injury or illness, and survived the gauntlet of vying for positions on their respective service’s team. The Warrior Games serves as the sole opportunity every year to bring together post-9/11 wounded warriors across all services, and they showcase the power and resilience of wounded warriors and their families. They compete in eight individual and team sports, including archery, cycling, field, sitting volleyball, shooting, swimming, track, and wheelchair basketball.

Unique to Team Army is the incorporation of Master Resilience Trainer-Performance Experts (MRT-PEs), who, as part of U.S. Army Ready and Resilient’s capabilities, provide specialized mental skills coaching to support each athlete’s optimal performance in their sports, and maintain their individual resilience. The MRT-PEs have advanced degrees in sport and performance psychology, and were able to tailor their approach and delivery of skills, such as building confidence and energy management, in a way that best supports each team and each athlete. Each MRT-PE partnered with one of the eight sport coaches and formed a dual-threat coaching team to help the athletes achieve success, both at the individual and team level.

Adaptive sports are a huge part of recovery and transition for Soldiers. “My experience was incredible, from the physical changes to mental health. Being at the Warrior Transition Battalion gives me a reason to press on and adjust to my new normal,” Crook says. “Adaptive sports is a well-kept secret that must be tapped into,” he concluded.

Another Team Army athlete, Col. Michael Malone, talked about the mental skill of visualization and how it helped him. Between his archery and swimming competitions, he explains, “I did very well today [at archery] so now, I’m on to visualizing and thinking through preparation for the swimming event so I’ll do mental rehearsal for that over the next couple of days. It’s all about trying to develop that game plan, trying to visualize how you’re going to compete in the competition and then going out and doing it how you see it in your head. This has definitely helped.”

Congratulations to all the Team Army athletes! We look forward to being a part of your experience next year.
Army Launches Holistic Health and Fitness Initiative

By Joseph Lacdan, ARNews - Center for Initial Military Training

The Army has more obese Soldiers than ever before, and to address the problem, senior Army leaders discussed a holistic approach that includes vegan options at dining facilities and box breakfasts at fitness centers.

Currently, one in 20 Soldiers fails the Army Physical Fitness Test annually and 13 percent of Soldiers are clinically obese, according to statistics from the Army Surgeon General’s Office that were presented Monday at the 2017 Medical Symposium. The conference was hosted by the Association of the U.S. Army in San Antonio, Texas.

“I do think that we’ve been recognizing that what we are doing has not been working,” said Michael McGurk, director of the Research and Analysis Directorate at the Army Center for Initial Military Training. “Holistic health and fitness is a radical change -- radical departure. It is going to cost the Army money, time and people. And we’ve got to be willing to give that up to make the changes that we need.”

The Army’s new campaign plan, called “Holistic Health and Fitness” focuses on improving the Soldier selection process, physical performance, performance education, and transforming and improving Soldier fitness/training centers.

Tim Higdon, Healthy Army Communities program manager, said one suggestion is to have fitness centers provide box breakfasts so that Soldiers in a time crunch will not need to choose between having breakfast and working out. Higdon said HAC is also planning to attempt innovations such as requiring 15 to 50 percent of vending machines to have healthier options, while others will be 100-percent comprised of healthy items. Vegetarian and vegan options may also be added to dining hall menus.

“It’s about action and what we could do next to improve the overall health of our communities,” Higdon said.

Healthy Army Communities has identified eight demonstration installations to test some of the new measures: Fort Belvoir, Virginia; Fort Meade, Maryland; Fort Riley, Kansas; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Fort Benning, Georgia; Fort Huachuca, Arizona; Redstone Arsenal, Alabama; Fort Bliss, Texas; USAG Italy, and USAG Humphreys, South Korea.

McGurk noted that the Army has not changed its physical fitness test since 1980. He said the field manual for Army Physical Readiness Training, FM 7-22, is now being rewritten with a new name, Holistic Health and Fitness.

“Wearing the uniform that says ‘U.S. Army’ is a privilege and an honor and there [are] responsibilities,” McGurk said. “And one of them is a baseline level of fitness and capability which I think we need to maintain.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Gragg of TRADOC said five installations and eight fitness centers will transition to meet the new initiatives. At those locations, sports performance, nutrition and PT training classes will take the place of recreational activities, and will take place during non-peak fitness hours. Units can use the facilities for training and Soldiers who need additional PT time can also take courses.

Col. Matthew Garber, director of the Rehab and Reintegration Division at the Office of the Surgeon General, said that new emphasis will also be placed upon decreasing the impact of muscular skeletal injuries on readiness. Looking at the entry standards and alternative training methods could help decrease preventable injuries during physical training. He also said it is important that Soldiers suffering from muscular and skeletal injuries have access to treatment.

“When you do get hurt, we know it’s vital that you get seen early to prevent a chronic problem from developing,” Garber said.

(Continued On Next Page)
Army Launches Holistic Health and Fitness Initiative (cont.)

Retired Brig. Gen. Peter Palmer said to achieve a truly holistic approach to health and fitness, the cognitive aspect of training must be studied.

“The key challenge here is if we’re going to really talk human performance, we’ve got to understand how we actually perform, Palmer said. “And that’s why I emphasize the brain portion.”

In another panel discussion, Maj. Gen. Brian Lein, commanding general of the Army Medical Department Center, discussed the possibility of artificial intelligence aiding the work of Army medics in the battlefield. Lein said that the Army is already experimenting with virtual reality in training situations at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. There, simulations with frames of cockpits and armored vehicles simulate emergency medical situations. Lein said the Chinese already have an A.I. system for medical providers.

“That’s never going to replace the anxiety and the stress of a real patient bleeding to death in front of you,” Lein said. “But the closer that you can get to virtual reality, the better off we’re going to be.”

Surgeon General of the Army Lt. Gen. Nadja West noted that each facet of the combat medic process -- from training to veterinary assistance for military working dogs -- plays interdependent roles. She said each role has an integral part in assuring the Army’s warfighters are fit for battle.

“What keeps a Soldier of a free country reliable in battle?” West said. “I would say this, in addition to great leadership, great training ... (It is) the fact they know if they’re harmed or injured, someone will be there to render aid in any way that they can.”
Helping Behavioral Health Providers Leverage R2

From our partners at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) Research Transition Office

A short training module introducing new Behavioral Health Providers (BHPs) to the Army’s resilience program is being developed by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) Research Transition Office (RTO).

Programs such as the Master Resilience Trainer program (MRT) provide a common language to describe challenges, and strategies for negotiating those challenges. Many of the resilience skills taught to Soldiers are based on concepts and techniques already familiar to BHPs, but were relabeled to be more relatable and less stigmatizing to Soldiers (e.g., thinking traps vs. cognitive distortions). It is important that BHPs are familiar with the adapted terminology and skills taught in the Army’s resilience programs for two reasons: 1) they need to understand the language that might be used by their patients in describing their challenges; and 2) they might be able to leverage patients’ existing knowledge of resilience skills and concepts during therapy and other interactions.

The Afghanistan Theater of Operations Health Service Support Assessment (ATO-HSSA) observed some years ago that many BHPs were unfamiliar with the MRT skills, or how to incorporate MRT terminology into common treatment strategies. This knowledge gap was confirmed more recently, when WRAIR-RTO conducted focus groups with 36 BHPs in March 2017. To address this gap, WRAIR-RTO will produce a short (15-20 minutes) training module which will give an overview of the Army’s resilience program, and the ways in which knowledge of the program can be leveraged by BHPs. It will also alert the BHPs to the resilience training that is available to providers, to help prevent burnout and compassion fatigue. Expected delivery date is in 2018.

Did You Know?

Protective factors are skills, strengths, and resources that help people cope with stressful events. Some protective factors include: encouraging empathy, maintaining realistic optimism, and cultivating relationships with friends and family. Remember: These skills can be used on and off duty to help you to enhance your own resilience.
**Nervous System RESET Facilitator Training**

From our partners at the USAG White Sands Missile Range - Army Substance Abuse Program

The Nervous System RESET Facilitator Training Program is being offered at White Sands Missile Range through January 2018. Nervous System RESET is a resiliency model that is designed to teach people how to track, manage and modulate their stress responses. It is both an educational and skills-based approach that teaches simple, effective tools which help mitigate the impact of stress and which support better nervous system regulation and overall health. These tools include accessing the body's natural stress-recovery response which is a gentle shaking or trembling discharge.

The Facilitator Training Program is being offered by Jessica Schaffer, Nervous System Health Educator. With a background in body work, she has spent the past 20 years guiding people towards better health and body awareness. In addition, for four years she was a representative and Certification Trainer for the global organization, Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises®(TRE) where she honed her skills in working with the concept of therapeutic tremoring. Nervous System RESET is a resiliency model that she has curated from her 20 years of experience working with clients and students who have suffered the impact of trauma and stress.

The Nervous System RESET Facilitator Training Program is a pilot program that aims at training a small group of facilitators on post. The goal is to have facilitators that can introduce this resiliency model and these stress management tools to the White Sands population, thereby promoting greater community resilience and readiness.

**What:** Nervous System RESET Facilitator Training Program, a resiliency model that teaches effective tools for stress management to be used by all members of the White Sands community.

**Where:** White Sands Missile Range Professional Development Center

**When:** The program is an ongoing training program that will culminate in January 2018 at which time the members of the Community Health Promotion Council (CHPC) working group will develop strategies for implementation and data collection.

**Why:** To train facilitators on post who can implement this model within the White Sands community. The goal is to foster greater awareness of stress physiology and to empower people with simple, effective tools to counteract the impact of stress in their lives, thereby promoting greater community resilience and readiness.

**Who:** Jessica Schaffer, Nervous System Health Educator. With a background in body work, she has been in private practice since 1998 guiding people towards better health and body awareness. Six members from the CHPC working groups will be trained in the initial phase which culminates in January 2018.

Questions or Comments?

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