



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-4000

JUL 14 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
COMMAND

SUBJECT: Peer-to-Peer Support for Caregivers of Recovering Service Members

In June 2014, the Department of Defense (DoD) launched a new peer-to-peer caregiver support initiative, which the First Lady of the United States announced on April 11, 2014. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) worked with the Military Departments and United States Special Operations Command to develop this concept, a description of which is attached to this memorandum.

It is estimated that over 1.1 million caregivers support wounded, ill, and injured post-9/11 Service members and Veterans in some capacity, the majority of who are family members. This initiative is part of the DoD caregiver support effort that Congress authorized under section 1611 of Public Law 110-181, *The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008*. The purpose of this effort is to provide caregivers a support network with which to share their experiences and gain valuable information in an approachable environment. Not only do the caregivers consistently ask for this type of support, but peer-to-peer support is evidence based. Initial site locations will be in the National Capital Region, with full nationwide implementation no later than June 2015.

Thank you for your continuing efforts to improve the care, management, and quality of life for our recovering Service members and those who care for them.


Jessica L. Wright

Attachment:
As stated

cc:
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Chief, National Guard Bureau

Caregiver Peer-To-Peer Support Initiative

Purpose: To provide information on a caregiver support initiative that establishes caregiver peer-to-peer forums at designated military installations, using Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLCs) in collaboration with Military Community & Family Policy (MCFP), Warrior Care Policy (WCP), and Service Wounded Warrior Program Recovery Care Coordinators (RCCs).

Background: MFLCs are MCFP contractors who provide face-to-face non-medical counseling and briefings on and off installations to Service and family members. They are licensed/certified in states, territories, and the District in a mental health field to practice independently and possess masters or doctorate degrees. The Recovery Coordination Program (RCP) supports caregivers, and the more than 500 Service Wounded Warrior Program RCCs assist in the implementation of caregiver programs and initiatives on behalf of Department of Defense.

Discussion:

- Through an initiative that began in June 2014, MFLCs at Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force installations with recovering Service members (118 out of a total of 523 DoD installations) will organize and conduct voluntary peer-to-peer forums to provide caregivers an opportunity to interact and gain from one another's experience.
 - The initiative launched at FT Belvoir on June 17, and feedback was positive.
 - The forums will be rolled out at the 118 installations no later than June 2015. The phased rollout provides an opportunity to incorporate lessons-learned and promote participation.
- For those military caregivers who are not within 50 miles of an installation, or who are unable to attend a local group forum, military caregiver peer support webinars will be hosted on Military OneSource for the geographically dispersed or for caregivers unable to attend a local group forum. A webinar is planned for July 30.
- Caregiver peer-to-peer forums will positively impact caregivers' quality of life by providing emotional support and a unique resource for valuable information.
 - Enables caregivers to directly help each other in ways no other program or helping professional can. Puts in place the inclusiveness and empowerment that can only come from direct interaction with others "like me."
 - Guided discussion among caregivers will often be more practical, accurate, and thorough as based on their personal "real life" experiences.
 - Even standard information delivered by another caregiver is naturally improved in this type of forum leading to better acceptance and retention.
- WCP, DHA, and MCFP developed this initiative in response to a request from the White House Domestic Policy Council and to meet the requirement in section 1611(f)(2) of PL 110-181, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, which directs uniform standards and requirements for the provision of advice and training to family members regarding care for recovering Service members.
- OSD, DHA, and individual installations are advertising the forums to RSMs and caregivers on their respective websites.

Points of Contact:

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