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U.S. Army Program Supports Warriors in Transition

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The **U.S. Army Warrior Transition Command** (WTC) is a major subordinate command built from the ground up to successfully care for and transition wounded, ill and injured soldiers and their families back to the Army, or to civilian life, through a comprehensive program of medical care, rehabilitation, professional development, and personal goals. The program currently serves over 9,000 individuals and has helped nearly 56,000 soldiers since June 2007.

According to Brig. Gen. Gary Cheek, Commanding General, Warrior Transition Command Assistant Surgeon General, Warrior Care and Transition, “for 30 years our peacetime Army did not have a coordinated system to care for wounded warriors.”

In the post-Vietnam era, wounded soldiers were sent to one rehabilitation center located in Valley Forge, Pa., but it was soon realized that for a modern, volunteer Army, only one rehabilitation center location was not realistic because the soldier was required to leave his family for a prolonged period of time. Currently, 29 Warrior Transition Units are located across the U.S. to allow soldiers to heal near their family or other base of support.

When a soldier first arrives at a Warrior Transition Unit (WTU) it is important for the soldier to choose a transition plan and remain committed. These career options could include returning to the Army, returning to the Army with a new skill, or separating from the Army. The physical recovery of the soldier continues regardless of the career path chosen.

Soldiers are given access to state-of-the-art facilities throughout their recovery and have access to experts in areas such as sports medicine, orthopedics, traumatic brain injury, and post-traumatic stress. While recovering, soldiers also have the opportunity to stretch their physical aptitude by participating in adaptive sports and programs like Road 2 Recovery, a cycling program that challenges wounded warriors to complete strenuous bicycle rides that cover hundreds of miles.

“We want to excite each soldier about his future so that he works hard during rehabilitation and sets goals for himself...we view success as directly related to attitude,” said Cheek.

Recently DoD and the U.S. Olympic Committee partnered to provide an athletic opportunity for wounded service members across the nation. The Warrior Games, to be held in May, will bring together 200 wounded, ill and injured athletes from all branches of service to compete in events including swimming, track and field, archery, and cycling. The goal of the Warrior Games is to recognize the role of sport in emphasizing ability over disability.

“The message is that you can have a rich life...you still have abilities,” said Cheek.

WTUs also help with the real world transition of soldiers by offering educational courses, internships, and work experience during the rehabilitation process. The WTC partners with many federal agencies, corporate partners, the VA, educational institutions, and VSOs.

“Most soldiers are worried about their future so the more we can do to help them establish a path to their future the stronger they will work at their reintegration,” said Cheek.

Rehabilitation is not the only benefit soldiers gain from the program; many programs and opportunities offered are useful to family members too. For example, Soldier Family Assistance Centers (SFACs) are located at all WTUs. These centers provide educational information, employment guidance, family counseling, and other resources. Families can enroll in programs and attend sessions specific to individual needs.

“Although we have a tremendous program, it is not a perfect program,” said Cheek. For that reason, the WTC program is constantly evolving. “The next phase [of the program] will be to have a family plan to begin in the next four months or so to complement the soldier’s comprehensive transition plan. By tracking elements of the family plan we can determine how best to help soldiers and families as we move forward into the future.”

For more information about the U.S. Army Warrior Transition Command please visit <http://WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil>.