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Understanding Psychological Health

Posted by: Dr. Jack Smith | Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Clinical and Program Policy and Acting Chief Medical Officer, TRICARE Management Activity

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

On a recent TV commercial for insurance an actor said “life comes at you fast.” Isn’t that the truth?

We all have lots to deal with every day--family issues, work, finances and the general “busy-ness” of life. Stress can affect our moods and how we think, feel and act as we deal with both positive and negative situations in life. May is Mental Health Month and it’s the perfect time to remind all of our beneficiaries that if the stresses in your life are getting you down, TRICARE is here to help.

Many people find it difficult to talk about their emotions and mental health. All of us experience some level of stress every day, and everyone feels worried, anxious, sad or stressed out at times. We all have our own techniques and strategies for managing that stress—exercise, sports, hobbies, prayer or meditation to name just a few. However, sometimes stress-related feelings can seem overwhelming or become serious enough to interfere with daily life. When this occurs, the thoughts and feelings may be more indicative of a problem for which you might want to seek help. Symptoms frequently associated with a need for further evaluation and possible treatment include ongoing problems with sleep, chronic sadness or depression, feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, or thoughts of wanting to harm yourself or others.

If you’ve been having trouble with stress, depression or other symptoms, help is available. We now know that many of the symptoms associated with depression are related to chemical imbalances in the brain, which usually respond to treatment with medications. However, medication is not always the answer. For many stress-related conditions, brief counseling may be all that is needed to help you develop and practice better coping skills.

The most important message is that help is available. If you’re looking for information, you can start with www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth to find news articles, self-assessment programs, and behavioral health flyers and brochures. “A TRICARE Guide: Understanding Behavioral Health” is also available on TRICARE’s Web page at www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth/Downloads.aspx. Your TRICARE benefit covers mental and behavioral health care that is medically or psychologically necessary for treatment of a behavioral health disorder.

The Web-based TRICARE Assistance Program (TRIAP), which launched in August 2009, uses evolving telecommunication technologies to bring counseling assistance and behavioral health to active duty service members, spouses and other eligible family members 18 years of age or older. Eligible beneficiaries can link to their regional contractor’s TRIAP site and get more information about the program at www.tricare.mil/TRIAP. You can also see your primary care provider, who can help you get whatever care you may need.

If you’re not sure you want or need medical assistance, confidential counseling is also available to active duty members and their families through Military OneSource at www.militaryonesource.com or you may just want to reach out to your chaplain, pastor or a trusted friend to talk about how you’re feeling. The message for Mental Health Month is that if you or someone you care about needs help dealing with stress or depression, don’t wait until the situation worsens. Reach out and seek help now.