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Building Resilience Through Self-Guided, Private Care

Barbara Irwin | Health.mil

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The Department of Defense, military health care providers and unit leaders continue to emphasize the importance of resilience in troops. Service members who face limited provider availability and the stigma of being labeled with a behavioral illness stress the need for privacy and ease of access in seeking care. Dr. Greg Gham, director of the National Center for Telehealth and Technology and Dr. Robert Ciulla, Chief of the National Center for Telehealth and Technology's Population & Prevention Programs, believe that troop resilience can be achieved by increasing access to behavioral health care while also decreasing stigma. Their proposed solution: Providing service members with easily accessible and private care in other ways than face-to-face office visits, while maintaining an interactive feel.

In August 2008, the National Center for Telehealth and Technology Center launched afterdeployment.org as a pilot project to evaluate interactive mental health care for **service members, veterans, families, and providers**. The web portal provides media-rich, web-based, self-care solutions addressing behavioral health issues and adjustment challenges commonly faced post deployment. It offers an online, interactive option to care that is self-guiding, self-paced, accessible and private. Visitors can even use the site without registering.

afterdeployment.org offers service members and veterans information on 18 behavioral health care topics, including post-traumatic stress, depression, anger, and anxiety. The site also provides information on topics that might impact a service member's mental health: mild traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, tobacco, and alcohol and drugs.

Service members, veterans and families who use the site also benefit from a sense of community. Visitors can join the Facebook group, receive Twitter messages and download podcasts based on warrior stories and personal challenges from iTunes or Zoom. An Outreach Call Center phone number (866-966-1020) and the National Suicide Hotline (800-273-TALK) connect the user to a live behavioral health care professional; a Google map locator connects a visitor to a provider or resource close to home.

Attracting more than 100,000 visitors as of April 2010, afterdeployment.org releases new content each week and continually seeks user feedback to meet the needs of their visitors. As a result of this feedback and user contributions, a new phase of afterdeployment.org launched this Spring.

More materials that will continue to be added to afterdeployment.org in the coming months, including more than twenty standardized self-assessments, new and updated interactive workshops, community forums, a blog, and a specialized portal where providers can go to obtain everything from resilience training to quick tips about military culture and treating PTSD.

Overall, response from those who use afterdeployment.org has been positive: Post-deployment service members say they prefer the interactive, engaging resources; families enjoy hearing what other people have experienced after their loved one's homecoming; providers note the quality of information and self-administered assessments; and unit leaders are promoting the website to their personnel.

If you or someone you know has recently returned from deployment and would benefit from behavior health care that is easily accessible and private, encourage them to visit afterdeployment.org.