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What's New & Notable?

afterdeployment.org was mentioned in recent testimony to the United States Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee regarding suicide prevention in the military. Brigadier General Loree Sutton discussed AD as one of the Defense Centers of Excellence's tools for addressing the mental health needs of service members and their families. Click here for more information.

AD recently began working with T2's Innovative Technology Applications team and their developers to pilot some of AD's tools in a web 2.0 environment. The development team at 2b3d is building an AD relaxation "holodeck" in the Second Life platform. Second Life users will soon be able to practice relaxation skills while sitting in a rolling meadow, on a quiet beach, or atop a mountain overlooking the water.



Welcome to afterdeployment.org's Newsletter!

Launched in August 2008, afterdeployment.org (AD) is a 24/7 self-care solution, targeting typical problems faced by the military community following a deployment.

Each quarterly newsletter will deliver the latest information about AD development, content, special features, facts and figures, topical articles, and upcoming events.

This issue "spotlights" the project's leadership. U.S. Army Brigadier General Loree Sutton directs the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE), while Dr. Greg Gahm, COL (RET) directs a DCoE directorate, the National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2). The steady support and leadership of BG Sutton and Dr. Gahm have made the realization of this website possible.

BG Sutton has noted that AD represents "an important step in providing the military community with comprehensive, online mental health resources." Dr. Gahm has pointed to AD as "one of the core programs that exemplify the projects that DCoE and T2 are delivering to the military community."

A project of this magnitude has required the expert contributions and diligence of many dedicated individuals. A hearty thank you to our many supporters and contributors: TRICARE Management Activity, Health Affairs; the VA National Centers for PTSD in Boston, Palo Alto, and Honolulu; Tripler Army Medical Center; Madigan Army Medical Center; the Portland VA Medical Center; the National Center for Deployment Psychology at USUHS; the Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (CHPPM); Brooke Army Medical Center; The Center for the Intrepid; and the AMEDD Center and School Pastoral Ministry Training.

We look forward to sharing future AD newsletters with you.

We welcome your feedback (afterdeployment@universal-inc.net).

Sincerely, Robert Ciulla, Ph.D. afterdeployment.org Program Manager

Spotlight on Leadership

BG Loree Sutton



Brigadier General Loree K. Sutton, the highest ranking psychiatrist in the U.S. Army, has served as director of the

Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury since November 2007. She also serves as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs.

Dr. Greg Gahm, COL (RET)



Greg Gahm, Ph.D., Director of the National Center for Telehealth & Technology (T2), is a former U.S. Army

clinical neuropsychologist and researcher with over 20 years of experience in military behavioral health. His leadership positioned the Psychology Department at Madigan Army Medical Center at the forefront of innovation for the Department of Defense.

Dr. Robert Ciulla



Since joining the Madigan Army Medical Center (MAMC) Psychology Department in June 2004, Robert Ciulla,

Ph.D., has served in lead positions and been at the forefront of various mental health program initiatives. In his current role as Program Manager of the Congressionally-mandated Web site, afterdeployment.org, Dr. Ciulla leads strategic planning efforts and establishes the project vision.

## Facts & Figures

- Since October 2001, approximately 1.64 million U.S. troops have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq (Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom).
- Women exposed to trauma show an increased risk for an alcohol use disorder even if they are not experiencing PTSD.

## Upcoming Events

### August 6-9, 2009

American Psychological Association  
2009 Conference  
Toronto, Ontario

### August 18-21, 2009

US Army Center for Health Promotion & Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM)  
Force Health Protection Conference  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

### September 17-18, 2009

Medicine 2.0  
Conference  
Toronto, Ontario

### September 24-25, 2009

American Telemedicine Association  
Conference  
Palm Springs, California

## Managing Trauma Triggers on *afterdeployment.org*

Written by:

*Eric Kuhn, Ph.D. and Julia Hoffman, Psy.D.*  
National Center for PTSD, Dissemination and Training Division – Palo Alto, CA

Reminders of traumatic deployment experiences can trigger a host of uncomfortable psychological and physical symptoms. Understandably, service members may begin to escape or avoid triggering situations - places, conversations, people - to circumvent distress. While this strategy *does* mitigate distress, it can severely undermine longer-term resilience and recovery efforts, and can lead to additional psychosocial problems (isolation, loss of social support, problems meeting major role requirements).

To help service members with deployment-related triggers, subject matter experts at the National Center for PTSD, Dissemination and Training Division (Palo Alto, CA), created two self-help tools for *afterdeployment.org* (AD): *R.I.D. yourself of triggers* and *P.L.A.N. to face triggers*. These tools were informed by evidence-based PTSD practices and use brief, content-relevant mnemonic devices to help ensure that they are remembered and utilized during stressful times.

The *R.I.D.* tool addresses unexpected trauma triggers which are known to frequently occur in PTSD. *R.I.D.* stands for **Relax, Identify the trigger, and Decide on your response**. This tool is informed by exposure techniques (e.g., Prolonged Exposure Therapy), a PTSD intervention that has a substantial evidence base and is strongly recommended in the [VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guidelines](#) for PTSD.

The *R.I.D.* tool is designed to help manage distressing reactions to triggers. Instead of quickly escaping from a triggering situation, the individual is encouraged to first take a moment to relax using an anxiety management skill such as deep breathing. Next, they are instructed to identify the trigger and specifically notice how it is different from the original traumatic event. This helps to distinguish between truly dangerous and non-dangerous situations and reestablishes a sense of safety. Finally, the individual is encouraged to decide on a response that is consistent with their

recovery goals (e.g., tolerating distress to meet work or relationship obligations). While the distress is uncomfortable, the distress will lessen even when the individual stays with the situation instead of escaping from it. By not reacting to triggers in an automatic and potentially detrimental way, a sense of control is regained.

Often, service members know in advance that they will have to encounter a triggering situation or stressful event. This could be a crowd (e.g., at a family member's wedding), a gathering of war buddies, or a celebration that might include sudden loud noises such as fireworks or gunfire. The *P.L.A.N.* tool was created to help service members successfully cope with these expected stressful situations. *P.L.A.N.* stands for **Prepare for the situation, Let go of your worry, Accept that you will experience distress yet it is possible to manage your reaction, and Note all of your coping skills and helping resources**. Like *R.I.D.*, *P.L.A.N.* is informed by evidence-based PTSD therapies. Specifically, it reflects an adaptation of Michenbaum's (1985) Stress Inoculation Training (SIT), which has broad empirical support for the management of unpleasant emotions, negative thoughts, and dysfunctional behaviors associated with feared stimuli. This model has been successfully adapted by various PTSD treatment developers and is another strongly recommended treatment in the [VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guidelines](#) for PTSD.

Similar to the therapies from which these tools were adapted, *AD's* interactive workshop on managing war memories and trauma reminders leads users through a psycho-education phase, a planning phase, and an experimentation phase. By leveraging opportunities for interactivity and personalization, the *AD* workshop allows users to learn more about their own triggers. It is possible to craft a strategy for using the *R.I.D.* and *P.L.A.N.* tools together in a structured way to address personally identified psychosocial problems.

Given the high frequency of psychosocial problems related to trauma triggers, it is hoped that these evidence-informed self-help tools will be easy to remember, easy to use, and ultimately effective for recent returnees with post-deployment readjustment challenges. ♦

## What People are Saying

"I have sent out your website link to everyone I know because it is so on target. Bravo!" - Provider

"Coming back from deployment twice, I didn't know about this. Would've been beneficial so I didn't have to search Google for information." - Service Member

"The quality of the information and the self-administered tests are absolutely terrific! GREAT JOB!!!!" - Service Member

"...the videos, dealing with numerous different subjects, are affirmation that someone else has also experienced some of what the person may be going through. I think that these (videos) can be very self-assuring."  
- Family Member

"Very interesting. I'll use this site. It has a lot of information." - Service Member

"What I like most about this site: that someone even cared enough to build it." - Service Member

## Website Development Continues

In early May, the site underwent significant design changes. To improve navigation, AD's landing page was revised. And for users who are seeking immediate real-time contact with support staff, the new landing page also references the DCoE Outreach Call Center. The *Sleeping Better* Program's new, three-session **Managing Nightmares Workshop** will offer easy-to-use, skills-based tools for coping with nightmares.

*Project teams continue to expand content and improve the site's design features*

In coming months, AD will launch new programs focused on *Traumatic Brain Injury* and *Warrior Resilience*, and new workshop sessions in *Managing Pain* and *Injury-Related Sexual Functioning*.

In response to feedback, AD's subject experts are also developing content in several other areas, including, family/partner issues; veteran's concerns; military sexual trauma; nicotine cessation; financial and budgeting difficulties; and Accessing Healthcare. ♦

## Eye on the Future



### Planned Redesign

*afterdeployment.org* will soon have a dynamic new design, as well as expanded resources and features. The new version of the website will offer a search function, site map, and social networking features to include blogs and community forums. The self-help workshops are undergoing a substantial revision to provide greater interactivity and ease of use. The home page will offer regularly updated content in the form of daily quotes, brain builders, health tips, and polls. Future design plans will allow users to customize the site, maintain a journal, establish a personal profile detailing personal strengths and challenges, and interact in a virtual community environment. ♦

## Real Warriors.net Website

On 21 MAY 09, the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) launched a multi-year, public education campaign to combat the stigma associated with seeking mental health treatment. The campaign promotes resilience and encourages service members, veterans, and their families to seek treatment for psychological wounds via an interactive website, [www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net). Real Warriors profiles real service members who have sought treatment and continue to maintain successful military or civilian careers. The campaign also involves partnerships, media outreach, and social media tools to reach the broadest audience possible. DCoE also established the DCoE Outreach Center, a 24/7 call center that provides confidential answers to questions about psychological health and TBI. The Outreach Center can be reached toll-free at 1-866-966-1020, or via e-mail at [resources@dcoeoutreach.org](mailto:resources@dcoeoutreach.org). ♦

**Publications & Presentations**

Reger, M. A. & Gahm, G.A. (2009). A meta-analysis of the effects of internet-and computer-based cognitive-behavioral treatments for anxiety. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65 (1), 53-75.

**Telehealth Resources**

Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR)

Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association (JAMIA)

Health Games Research

Journal of Telemedicine and e-Health

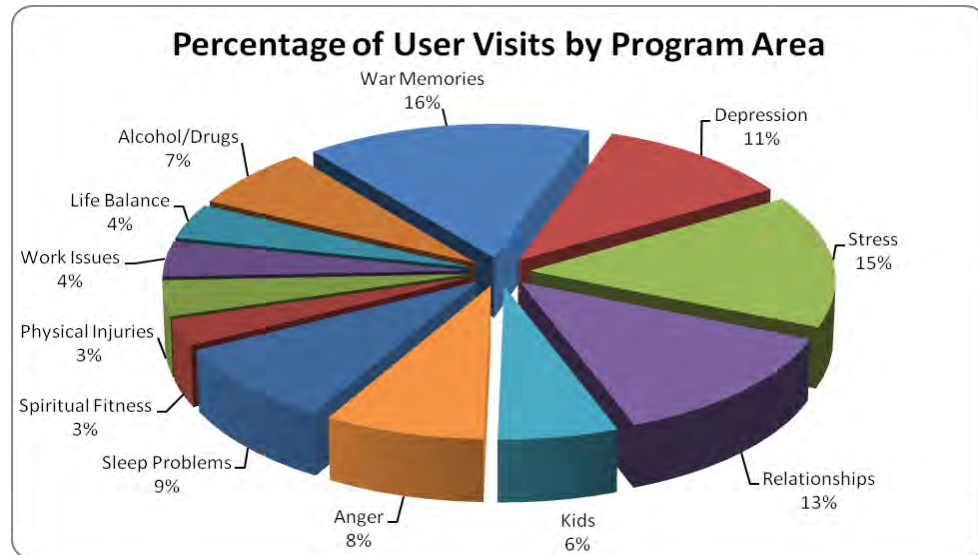
**Contact Us!**

Send an email to [afterdeployment@universal-inc.net](mailto:afterdeployment@universal-inc.net) with your feedback or questions, subscribe/unsubscribe to the newsletter, or request copies of an AD brochure.

**Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense or the Defense Centers of Excellence. The appearance of external hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by DCoE of the linked websites.

**Metrics: *afterdeployment.org* Program Visits**



The chart reflects AD program page visits from OCT 2008 – MAY 2009. The most visited programs are: *Adjusting to War Memories (Post Traumatic Stress)*, *Improving Relationships*, *Handling Stress*, and *Dealing with Depression*. Significantly, these most-visited programs are consistent with research and clinician-based reports regarding the most pressing concerns often identified by military personnel and their families. ♦

**Meet our Website Developers**

In January of 2009, a development contract was awarded to two East Coast companies.

*Pragmatics, Inc.* is the new technical contractor. Established in 1985, *Pragmatics* is a \$100 million company with over 450 employees. They are Carnegie Mellon Software Engineering Institute (SEI) Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) Level 4 certified, and ISO 9001:2000 registered. *Pragmatics* has built and maintained information systems for many U.S. government organizations including the U. S. Army, Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Department of State (DoS), and Office of Comptroller of the Currency (OCC).



Headquartered in Vienna, VA, *Next Tier Concepts, Inc.*, (NT concepts) serves as a subcontractor in the development process. NT Concepts, a woman-owned, 8(a) certified, small disadvantaged business, is a leading professional services provider with over 10-years experience in the information technology solutions industry. ♦



**Websites linking to *afterdeployment.org***

The following websites reference *afterdeployment.org*.

- Military OneSource
- TRICARE.mil
- MarineWives.com
- RealWarriors.net
- Army.com
- LIFELines.navy.mil
- DCoE Outreach Center
- Arizona State University Virtual Counseling Center
- Aviano Airman & Family Readiness Center