

PTSD support center to open

[HOPE HODGE](#)

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Jacksonville is now home to one of only eight sites in the nation to host a new psychiatric program specifically designed to assist active-duty troops and their families struggling with mental and behavioral health issues.

Psychiatric Services, Inc., announced this week that it would launch the Patriotic Support Program at Jacksonville's Brynn Marr Hospital. The program, offered in medical centers around the country with close proximity to military installations, provides service members with more options for treatment of common problems, including combat-related mental trauma and anxiety, as well as substance abuse. The centers will also feature specially trained medical staff, many with military and deployment experience, according to Scott Kardenetz, division president of PSI.

The announcement comes in the wake of accusations of by a former civilian contract psychiatrist at Camp Lejeune's Naval Hospital, Dr. Kernan Manion, that limited resources were leaving many Marines and sailors with extreme post-traumatic trauma without proper treatment.

In an earlier interview, the commanding officer of the Naval Hospital, Navy Capt. Gerard Cox, said that the system had seen strain from ongoing war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the influx of thousands of troops to the base through the Grow the Force Initiative.

"One of the areas in which we've experienced the biggest and most obvious demand is for mental health services," Cox said.

In 2008, the Army and the Marine Corps reported the highest suicide numbers in decades, with incidents divided evenly between troops on deployment, returning troops and those who have never deployed. The Marine Corps reported 19 suicides per 100,000, or 46 suicides, and 146 attempts, the highest rate since 1995.

And that mental health need, Kardenetz said, is behind the Patriot Support Centers.

"We've experienced and seen an increased demand for our services, particularly in areas that are geographically close to major military installations," Kardenetz said. "We feel it's our obligation and our duty to organize and to step up and offer assistance where the military has requested such assistance."

Among the services the center will offer are group therapy, psychotherapy, psychoeducation, medications, family therapy and a working relationship with specialists and commanders on base to keep them involved in the treatment of service members, Kardenetz said.

Jay Kortemeyer, CEO of Brynn Marr Hospital, said the hospital had been working with the base for the past six months to explore ways they could collaborate to meet the needs of service members.

“We feel very honored to be able to provide this service to the military,” Kortemeyer said, “At times where there have been multiple deployments, especially out of Camp Lejeune, we have seen the need to work closely with the military and also with their family members.”

The hospital plans to finish construction on an extension that will add an additional 12 beds in January and will next bring in and train staff in support of the program. Kortemeyer said the center should be operational within the next four to five months.

The center will serve troops on a referral basis from Camp Lejeune, New River Air Station and Cherry Point Air Station, as well as North Carolina’s Fort Bragg Army base.

“We’ve seen the strain that these years of deployment rotations have had,” Kardenetz said. “We have the resources and the expertise to reach out and help, and we’re honored to do so.”

Contact Hope Hodge at 910-219-8453 or hhodge@freedomenc.com.