



Counselors to get training for treating post-traumatic stress

The Oklahoma National Guard and a local nonprofit are hoping to create a network of trainers to help soldiers who come home with post-traumatic stress disorder

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Think of the worst thing that ever happened to you, multiply that bad memory several times over, and imagine reliving it several times a day.

Experts said that's what life is like for soldiers who return from war with post-traumatic stress disorder. With about 3,400 Oklahoma National Guardsmen set to deploy to Afghanistan next year with the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Guard leaders want to make sure those soldiers can get the help they need when they return to the state.

The Guard is working with Veterans Families United, a local nonprofit, to bring a trainer next month who will teach Oklahoma counselors in one of the three recognized treatment strategies for soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The training will begin July 9 and is open to counselors working at least 30 hours a week in a community nonprofit setting. Organizers said they are working on setting a training session at a later date for counselors in private practice.

E.C. Hurley, a licensed psychotherapist, is an expert in EMDR therapy, which stands for eye movement, desensitization and reprocessing. Hurley, who is the primary trainer in the method for the U.S. Army, said the need for counselors who can work with soldiers has never been greater.

"Statistics indicate the range of PTSD runs from 18 percent to 25 percent among combat veterans," Hurley said.

"We want the military to provide that treatment, but these people eventually return to their community and need help."

Cynde Collins-Clark, of Edmond, is a licensed counselor who started Veterans Family United after her son, Joe Collins, returned from Iraq in 2004 with post-traumatic stress.

She said the therapy changes the way soldiers think about a bad memory.

"It helps them to remember what happened and to be able to deal with that memory in

a different way that empowers them in their life and gives them hope," Clark said.

Hurley, himself a combat veteran, works in private practice near Fort Campbell, Ky., where he mostly treats soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division. He said everyone is affected by time in a combat zone.


Soldiers with post-traumatic stress can suffer nightmares that make it difficult to sleep, sensitivity to light and sound, and a variety of other symptoms that make it difficult to function.

"For whatever reason, when that memory is activated, it is often times like that person is reliving what happened," Hurley said. "EMDR is a process that allows the maladaptively stored memory to be reprocessed into what we would call healthy resolution."

In addition to his work with the military, Hurley is a trainer with EMDR's Humanitarian Assistance Program, which began after the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. The program brings trainers to areas of special need, usually after natural or manmade disasters, where people will need therapy for post-traumatic stress.

Although the training is helpful for soldiers, it can be used to treat anyone suffering from post-traumatic stress. Hurley said he specializes in working with the military because he sympathizes with their situation.

"The objective is to provide a network of clinicians that have been trained in an effective model for treating these veterans so they can reclaim their lives."

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