

## Chaplains Try A New Path To Deal With PTSD

by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



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Carrie Doehring, an associate professor of pastoral care is pictured in a classroom at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver on Friday, Jan. 28, 2011, where she teaches chaplains to respond to the stress of deployments amid two protracted wars. Doehring helped develop the one-year program for the Air Force, which wanted another way for its chaplains to respond to the stress of deployments amid two protracted wars.

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A Colorado theology school is teaching Air Force chaplains to consider the religious beliefs of servicemen and women to better help them cope with post-traumatic stress.

The goal is to build trust so a chaplain can encourage service members to draw on their individual concepts of God and spirituality, said Carrie Doehring, an associate professor of pastoral care at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver.

Doehring helped develop the one-year program for the Air Force, which wanted another way for its chaplains to respond to the stress of deployments amid two protracted wars.

Doehring said she believes it's the only program of its kind in the country.

One student graduated last year and four are enrolled this year.

"This is incredibly helpful when dealing with trauma survivors," the graduate, Air Force Chaplain Dallas Little, said in an e-mail to The Associated Press. Little, a captain, is deployed in southwest Asia but said he couldn't disclose where for security reasons.

Little said he starts by trying to understand a service member's religious views. Trust and acceptance come more quickly, he said, and that person is more likely to relate the traumatic experience to Little so he can help.

Little said he's used the approach in a veterans hospital, an Air Force hospital, a base chapel and on deployment, and it has worked well in each setting.

He also said it also discourages him from "premature judgment, hasty moralizing or proselytizing."

Chaplain Matt Boarts, one of the students currently in the program, said he's learning to help others find the right words to express their traumatic experiences or to phrase the questions they may have.

"They come back having seen things they don't know how to share," said Boarts, an Air Force major. "They become isolated. They don't know how to ask it or they think the words in their head might be offensive."

If people want to ask for his spiritual advice about their experience, he will give it, said Boarts, a Lutheran, but refraining from proselytizing isn't a dilemma for him, he said.

The issue of proselytizing is a delicate one, Doehring said.

"If they were leading worship where people have come to a Christian service of worship, of course they would lead out of their own tradition," she said of the chaplains. "Or if they're leading a prayer before troops go on a mission and the troops have volunteered to come to that prayer, they would use their own traditions."

But when people go to a chaplain for help with post-traumatic stress or other issues, they want someone who respects their views and won't try to impose other beliefs on them, she said.

Some military organizations, including the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., have been accused of tolerating unwanted proselytizing by conservative Christians. That wasn't a factor in the Air Force's decision to support Iliff's program, said Abner Valenzuela, a chaplain and a major in the Air Force Office of the Chief of Chaplains.

"We're just responding to the emerging needs," he said, referring to the stresses of deployment.

Measuring the training's success is difficult, Valenzuela said, as it is with most things chaplains do.

"You can kind of find out that what you are doing is effective based on the feedback from the person you are helping," he said.

The Air Force pays for the training. Iliff officials declined to release how much the Air Force is paying but said tuition for a one-year, full-time masters program is about \$16,000 a year.

Students are required to have a Master of Divinity degree to enter and are awarded a Master of Arts in pastoral and spiritual care when they graduate. Required courses include "Impact of War on Pastoral Care of Families," "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Pastoral Psychological and Theological Responses," and a comparative religion course.

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Online:

Iliff School of Theology: <http://www.iliff.edu/>