



Salute to Spouses Blog

We're excited to be blogging about the latest topics in military life. We want to keep you informed on topics such as current events, education, career advice, etc. Feel free to post comments or questions to any of our entries.



Salute to Spouses

JOIN THE COMMUNITY

Free Acupuncture for Pain and PTSD

By STS Staff
December 7, 2015

By Christine Cioppa

The Department of Defense (DoD) is using acupuncture and has been for a while. In fact, the U.S. Air Force even has an Acupuncture and Integrative Medicine Center at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland.

Retired Air Force Colonel Richard C. Niemtow, M.D., Ph.D., MPH, is leading the military's research on using acupuncture for pain on the battlefield. Still, it is not a treatment that is typically covered by most insurance companies, including Tricare.

While acupuncture gains ground within the DoD and Veterans Health Administration, there are other places to try it out. Through the Acupuncturists Without Borders (AWB) Military Stress Recovery Project, veterans, active military (including reservists) and their families can seek out free treatment for chronic pain and post traumatic stress (PTSD).

"We have about 35 clinics in various parts of the country run by volunteers that we've trained to do trauma treatment," says Carla Cassler, DAOM, L.Ac., Co-Director of Acupuncturists Without Borders. She says many veterans have a combination of pain, PTSD and some reliance on medications. "Some are also taking a lot of medications. Medications cause a whole set of problems in and of itself," adds Cassler. "So the acupuncture is a simple treatment that works with all three things—pain, PTSD and substance dependence."

The organization was created a decade earlier after Hurricane Katrina, where volunteers provided free acupuncture to treat stress and trauma to those who needed it.

"After that, it was the height of the Iraq war," says Cassler. Many people were coming back with very little assistance for serious traumatic stress, she said. "So we started The Military Stress Recovery Project as a way of providing some services that we had provided in New Orleans."

Currently, AWB clinics throughout the country do about 40,000 treatments collectively per year. To find a location, go to <http://www.acuwithoutborders.org/veteransprogram.php>.

How It Works

"The pathways that are involved in pain, chronic pain, and trauma activation are shared neural pathways. So in other words, the network of nerves that are involved in pain patterns and trauma patterns are shared to some extent," Cassler says. This is why people with PTSD often have worse pain problems and vice versa, she explains.

Acupuncture helps in several ways. First, it promotes blood flow, which helps damaged tissue heal. Second, it helps nerve

\$6,000 SCHOLARSHIP For Military Spouses

Apply for the Salute to Spouses scholarship today and begin your education! You'll be on the way to your dream career.

BLOG CATEGORIES

- 3 [BE HEALTHY](#)
- 34 [DEPLOYMENT SPOUSE](#)
- 104 [EDITOR'S BLOG](#)
- 6 [HOLIDAY ADVICE](#)
- 5 [HOLIDAYS](#)
- 2 [LIFE OVERSEAS](#)
- 1 [NATURAL RX](#)
- 33 [PCS JOURNAL](#)
- 1 [Q&A](#)
- 11 [QUARTERS SWEET QUARTERS](#)
- 9 [SCHOLARSHIP](#)
- 1 [THE WANDERING LIFE](#)
- 5 [VOLUNTEERING](#)
- 21 [WEBSITES WE LOVE](#)
- 6 [SANDRA MOYER](#)
- 3 [SOCIAL MEDIA](#)
- 17 [SPOUSE SPOTLIGHT](#)
- 54 [THE COLLEGE SPOUSE](#)
- 2 [SALUTE TO SPOUSES](#)

pathways reset where pain signals are misfiring. With chronic pain, Cassler says that the nerve pathways that were firing in the initial stages of the pain keep firing. In three or four months, after the injury is healed, the pain is still there.

"So you have to treat the nervous system when you are dealing with chronic pain. You have to bring it back to where it can self-regulate and it only fires when it really should," she says.

Thirdly, acupuncture helps with substance dependence.

"It is really important to keep pain under control and to try to do it without opiates, which is unfortunately part of the picture for a lot of veterans. They are being given really, really strong opiates, then they become addicts. That is not a good configuration," Cassler says.

The DoD & Acupuncture

So why doesn't Tricare cover it? Or, does it? At least one base offers it. Cassler is hopeful.

"We are in the middle of trying to integrate this practice into mainstream healthcare. It is definitely more advanced in the DoD than it is in the VA," she says.

Retired Air Force Colonel Richard C. Niemtow, M.D., Ph.D., MPH, works for the DoD and studies battlefield acupuncture in the U.S. military. Last month he published research on battlefield acupuncture with two other doctors in the journal *Medical Acupuncture*. He is credited with the development of a type of ear acupuncture that reduces pain in minutes. The researchers concluded that this type of acupuncture is "an ideal technique" that provides "rapid pain relief in a few minutes with almost no side effects."

Currently, the DoD has one, full-time acupuncture center, located at U.S. Air Force Acupuncture and Integrative Medicine Center at Joint Base Andrews. Active duty and retired military personnel are being treated there. The center also provides training to healthcare professionals on battlefield acupuncture.

The VA, which is under congressional control and separate from the DoD, offers limited acupuncture.

There are some acupuncturists in the VA who are MDs. They can offer acupuncture if the medical director says yes. What is getting in the way of acupuncture being offered is an occupational code. While medical doctors can do it under their medical doctor code, not all doctors know it.

But, Cassler says things are changing with the addition of a labor code for acupuncturists. Soon, medical directors will have the option of hiring acupuncturists and providing acupuncture programs.

In the meantime, acupuncture for chronic pain and PTSD can be sought throughout the country through Acupuncturists Without Borders, for free. But it is just a matter of time before things change, and Cassler is content with that.

"We'd like to be out of business so to speak so the veterans can get it through their regular medical care. That is not quite accomplished yet," she says.

Find a Military Stress Recovery Project center near you:

<http://www.acuwithoutborders.org/veteransprogram.php>

Read "Battlefield Acupuncture in the U.S. Military: A Pain-Reduction Model for NATO," published in *Medical Acupuncture*, Volume 27, Number 5, 2015 at: <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/10.1089/acu.2014.1055>

0

Share This Article:

17 [RETIREMENT CHRONICLES](#)

18 [REBECCA YARROS](#)

64 [RESOURCES](#)

1 [UNDEFINED](#)

3 [WEBINAR](#)

5 [WE HEART MILITARY BLOGGERS](#)

7 [VETERAN SUPPORT](#)

1 [VETERANS DAY](#)

7 [VETERANS](#)

67 [DEPLOYMENT SOUNDTRACK](#)

85 [EDITORS BLOG](#)

2 [FINANCES](#)

8 [DEPLOYMENT](#)

28 [CAREERS](#)

14 [BRITTANY CASEY](#)

3 [HOMECOMING](#)

15 [MILITARY SPOUSE CAREERS](#)

22 [JOB FAIRS](#)

102 [HOMEFRONT SPOUSE](#)

1 [MILITARY FAMILIES](#)

10 [MILITARY LIFE](#)

15 [MILITARY FAMILY SUPPORT](#)

22 [MILITARY LIFE](#)

3 [ED DENNIS](#)

18 [EDUCATION](#)

2 [9-5 WITH PAMELA MCBRIDE](#)

MONTHLY ARCHIVES

See Posts From:

SALUTE TO SPOUSES SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

- [Tiffany](#)
- [Erin](#)
- [Jennifer](#)
- [Stephanie](#)
- [Naomi](#)
- [Arnez](#)
- [Leticia](#)
- [Tabetha](#)

[View All](#)