

WARRIOR CARE

NEWSLETTER



A Message from Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Warrior Care Policy

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Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

I am pleased to introduce the July 2016 edition of the WCP Newsletter. What I'm particularly proud of, and what I hope you find valuable, are the first-hand accounts of some of DoD's finest programs and initiatives making a real difference in the lives of our Nation's wounded, ill, and injured service members, their caregivers and families. As my WCP colleagues can attest, I am a firm believer that good news stories best illustrate what WCP is all about. Also in this newsletter you'll find actionable information to make complex topics such as compensation for military caregivers a little easier to understand.

In this and future newsletter editions, I'll be introducing my WCP leadership team and their respective program areas. This edition's spotlight is Mr. Bret Stevens, director of disability evaluation systems.

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WCP Leadership Team Spotlight: Bret Stevens



Since 2009 Mr. Stevens has worked with a great team of DoD, military departments and Department of Veterans Affairs disability subject matter experts to implement improvements throughout the Disability Evaluation System (DES). Each year over 20,000 service members are evaluated to determine whether their wound, injury or illness causes them to no longer be able to perform their required duties to remain in the military. Since 1949, DoD has used the DES to evaluate and return to duty, separate or retire service members due to medical disability. In 2007, DoD and VA integrated their respective disability evaluation processes and developed an Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) that has improved the timeliness, accuracy and consistency of providing both DoD and VA disability compensation for wounded, ill and injured service members transitioning to veteran status.

We know how important it is for service members and their families to have the predictability they need to begin planning for life after service and the peace of mind that they are getting a fair and transparent evaluation. Through the IDES, Service members are better informed on the disability process. Service members are informed on the expected time to complete their case, can seek legal counsel to advise them during the process, and are also provided their expected DoD and VA disability determinations before separation to help them make better decisions about their transition from military service.

We seek customer feedback whenever possible, and survey responses show that currently, 87 percent of service members express satisfaction with their IDES experience. In this newsletter you will read a story from one such satisfied veteran and I encourage you to visit www.warriorcare.mil to learn more about the Office of Warrior Care Policy's Disability Evaluation Quality Assurance Program. ■

Share Your Story: Marine SSgt Adam Foutz Navigates the Disability Evaluation System



In 2009, Marine SSgt Adam Foutz was looking forward to transferring from his duty station in Okinawa, Japan to Nashville, Tennessee. However, shortly after returning to the US, he noticed major changes in his health and had lost more than 20 pounds in a few short weeks. At first, he attributed these changes to diet, exercise habits, and lifestyle, but it was not long before he was diagnosed with a chronic condition that would limit his ability to perform his military duties in the Marines. After diagnosis in 2011, he worked with his doctors and command to continue the pursuit of his health and career goals. However, it was not until after he had to leave Drill Instructor School in 2012 that Foutz realized the severity of his condition. "I tried to do what I could to maintain competitiveness in my field. In 2013 I graduated from Marine Corps Instructor of Water Survival, which led to a relapse and more follow-on treatment. That next year, my doctor sat down with my wife and me and told us I should expect to find a new career outside of the military." Foutz said "My goal was to become a drill instructor and then go on to be a marine officer through

the Enlisted Commissioning Program. After numerous talks with my family, my command, and military doctors, it became a reality that those goals would have to change." In December of 2014 Foutz started a more aggressive treatment, but this treatment did not improve his condition and his physician then referred him into the Disability Evaluation System.

The Department of Defense's Disability Evaluation System (DES) determines if a service member who has sustained a wound, illness, or injury is fit for duty. Though Foutz had heard about the DES through his peers, he didn't know much about it "I thought that it was an automatic career-ender. Some people told me it would take a long time to go through the [DES] process; some told me it would be quick. I had no idea what to believe, so immediately after receiving my DES brief from my Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Office, I went directly to the lawyer that was provided to help me to understand the process my role." Foutz admits that the process of going through the medical and physical evaluation board was emotional at times, often torn between wanting to complete the

process and wanting to stay on active duty. However, his understanding of the services and resources available to him helped shape it into a positive experience. "The DES is really an amazing process, you have resources available to you and the option to voice your concerns and case throughout. The integration with the Department of Veterans Affairs helps streamline care and benefits; which really helps to relieve a lot of that initial stress of the unknown."

When asked his advice for service members just entering the DES, he said "Don't worry about the process itself, it's going to happen – just focus on getting better. One way of doing that is to be an informed individual of the DES process. Understand what your role is and how your IDES attorney, and Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officer can help – but you have to be your own advocate. Ask questions, understand that the system is set up for your wellbeing and know that the process is facts based. The resources are there for your success, but it's imperative that you take the time to understand those resources, and utilize them as you navigate the DES process. Don't let your case get to the MEB and PEB if you feel your case isn't properly documented. Everything is based on the information you provide, so utilize your PEBLO and IDES attorney along the way."

Prior to Foutz being medically retired in February 2015, he was able to obtain his bachelor's degree in psychology and master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology. With the assistance of his employment coordinator he was able to obtain a career as a contractor for the Department of Defense doing information technology for the Office of Warrior Care Policy.

Question about the Disability Evaluation System? Visit: www.warriorcare.mil/disabilityevaluation ■

Share Your Story: Amélie Stone, Military Caregiver



My name is Amélie Stone and I was a caregiver for my husband, Devin, while he went through cancer treatment. Our life changing journey started in January 2014, when Devin went to see his doctor in Minot, ND, for a sinus infection and mentioned to him that he had some swollen lymph nodes in his neck. His doctor immediately mentioned Lymphoma as a very likely cause for the swelling and ordered more tests, including a biopsy. We spent the next few days worrying about what would happen to Devin if he really had cancer and how it would affect our lives (we had gotten married 8 months earlier and had just bought a house), his career, etc. Once it was confirmed that he had Hodgkin's Lymphoma, we packed up our bags and left for San Antonio, so that he could start treatment there as soon as possible.

Most caregivers can probably relate to the blur that are the first few days

after we get to the hospital. We are in an unfamiliar place away from our support system; we hear lots of different medical terms and acronyms that we do not know, and on top of that, we are extremely worried for our husband or child or relative that is receiving treatment. The whole process can quickly become overwhelming and isolating. Our family and friends are far away and it is hard to make new friends while spending most of the day in a hospital; and in a way, it is also hard for us at that time, to relate to people who are not going through something similar.

The few good friends I made while my husband was going through cancer treatment were actually fellow military caregivers. Their husbands were here for completely different reasons, but we all had a lot in common. For example, we all understood that making plans is difficult for caregivers, as our husbands' good days and bad days were unpredictable. We also all understood the frustration and the challenges of being a caregiver; and more importantly, we were there for each other when one of us needed help or just needed to talk. That is why, I believe, it is important to meet other caregivers.

One way to do so is to attend the caregiver peer-to-peer forums. I have gone to quite a few since they got

started in San Antonio and I have seen caregivers laugh and cry; I have seen some share fears and grievances that they would not usually share with people; but they knew that other caregivers would understand and not judge them. Talking to fellow caregivers is also a great way to realize that our new "normal", even though it is completely different from what it used to be, is "normal" for other caregivers too. I remember once, I told people at a peer forum that I used to poke my husband every so often while he slept after getting chemo, just to make sure that he was alive and okay; and that once he moved, I would stop worrying and would go back to what I was doing. Most people would find that silly, but at the forum, everybody laughed and said that they too do something similar to the person in their care!

My husband is now in remission. I do not poke him while he sleeps anymore; but I still attend peer-to-peer forums, because I am hoping that I can help other caregivers who are dealing with the challenges that come with that title. It is very important to have a good support system while going through this tough time. Thankfully, there are lots of resources available for military caregivers, so I would really encourage caregivers to use them. ■

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—Amélie Stone

Operation Warfighter Program Leads to a New Opportunity

Retired Air Force Major Dave Andrews didn't foresee the turn his life would take after a career-ending injury in the military. After serving his fourth tour as a Combat Advisor, Andrews found himself injured and recovering while assigned to the Army Warrior Transition Command. While in the command, he was introduced to Operation Warfighter (OWF), a Department of Defense program that matches qualified wounded, ill and injured service members with non-funded Federal internships. For Andrews, an interest in the internship program would lead him to a new career and educational opportunity.

After learning about the OWF program, Andrews sent his resume to an OWF Regional Coordinator and within two weeks, three Pentagon divisions wanted to interview him. However, instead of starting an internship, he was hired to work with J26 Warfighter Support Division.



The division knew he was going through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System process, but they worked with him to accommodate his need for a flexible work schedule. The new opportunity would prove to be life changing for Andrews.

"Injuries aren't the end of your life," said Andrews. "They are a turning point in your life to determine what you want to do next."

After working with the division for one year, what came next for Andrews was an opportunity to return to the National Defense Agency. For Andrews, it was an important move. He now works in strategy and policy at the Intelligence Unit, and feels that he is able to give

back to his community, the wounded, ill and injured population.

"OWF is an opportunity, not a handout. You have to do something with it," said Andrews. "I am able to contribute in very meaningful ways."

In 2014, Andrews set out to pursue his doctorate in Management and Homeland Security at Colorado Technical University. He was awarded a full-time scholarship for wounded, ill and injured service members. And rightfully suited, his dissertation is focused on helping managers and leaders help wounded, ill and injured service members succeed in work organizations.

"This is a population who is very self-motivated," said Andrews. "How you maximize them is by touching into their drive. We need to give the managers and leaders the tools to work with wounded, ill and injured service members."

Andrews also offers advice to wounded, ill and injured service members as they transition through their recovery.

"You get a choice when you get injured," said Andrews. "You can sit and look at a wall and think about what once was or you can take that opportunity. If you still have the drive, there will be an opportunity. If you're ready to move to the next stage of your life, OWF will be that doorway." ■



DoD Special Compensation to Service Members for Caregiver Support – Twitter Facts



1 SCAADL compensation helps help **offset the loss of income** by a caregiver who provides non-medical care, support, and assistance for an eligible service member



2 The amount of **DoD special compensation** for caregiver support depends upon the dependence level and care required, and also where the service member lives



3 SCAADL compensation can continue until the earlier of: **90 days post separation**; Service member no longer qualifies for SCAADL; Service member begins receiving VA Aide and Attendance benefits; or their caregiver begins receiving VA caregiver compensation



4 **SCAADL certification** indicates that, without assistance from a caregiver, the outpatient service member would require hospitalization, nursing home care, or other residential institutional care



5 **Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)** include: eating, grooming, bathing, dressing, toileting, assistance with prosthetics, and difficulty with mobility



6 **Supervision** or protection requirements include: planning, safety, seizures, sleep regulation, memory, and other behavioral risks or actions



7 If you are a catastrophically injured or ill service member, who has been released to outpatient care, contact your recovery team to determine your **eligibility for SCAADL**

For information on SCAADL visit <http://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/benefits/caregiver-compensation> ■



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