

Military Leaders Aim To Lower Post-Deployment Psychological Issues

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Annie Berman – Talk Radio News Service

“The hardest thing about deployment is coming home,” said Rep. Patrick J. Murphy (D-Penn.), an Iraq War Veteran who served in Iraq in 2003, at a hearing Wednesday before the House Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

In an effort to ease the process of coming home from deployment, the military has developed a number of programs aimed at combatting military suicides. The Marine Corps in particular has developed a “family readiness” program that is intended to help soldiers and their families cope with all of the stages of serving in the military, from basic training to deployment, to coming home.

As the number of military suicides continues to rise, leaders in the armed forces have grown frustrated with programs that have been put in place to lower this figure.

“The reality of it is, the target for [these programs] needs to be the assimilation of those who have served back into the general population dealing with the day to day whether it’s families, their kids, their education, their bills, and the relationship stressors associated with it,” said Admiral Patrick M. Walsh, Vice Chief of Naval Operations at the U.S. Navy.

General Peter W. Chiarelli, Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, explained that it’s not necessarily a matter of whether or not the programs are working, but rather a matter of finding ways to best match a specific program with an individual service member’s needs.

The U.S. Army has commissioned the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct a study entitled: “Collaborative Study of Suicidality and Mental Health in the U.S. Army,” a study that Chiarelli believes will help him and his colleagues understand what causes soldiers to commit suicide.

“[This is] the largest study of behavioral health ever undertaken by the Army....[it] will examine behavioral health, psychological resilience, suicide risk, suicide-related behaviors, and suicide deaths across the active and reserve components over all phases of a soldiers career,” he said.

Another initiative to helping soldiers cope with the stresses of deployment and coming home is a web based program that would provide online counseling via video, email, live chat, or instant messaging.

“[There is] a stigma of seeking mental health help. We’re trying to do everything possible to try and get rid of that stigma...It’s been done in Australia. They’ve had tremendous success. The

people have been more willing to open up online and that gets the geographically separated people who don't have the cocoon of the military post," said Chiarelli.