



# “WRAIR Forward”

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## COMMANDER’S CORNER

Inexpensive and widely available computer power make it possible to answer a range of questions that would be otherwise difficult to address. This quarter, we released a report demonstrating how computer simulations can be used to help identify significant increases in suicides rates. The tools can be applied to large groups such as to the entire population of the Army down to smaller sized units such as Battalions. Our hope is that tools of this nature can help provide early identification of problems and focus resources to help Soldiers.

-LTC Paul D. Bliese

## Progress for Battlemind Training



Plans to develop WRAIR’s Battlemind Training into a series of MEDCOM products were approved on 9 MAR 2007. Post-Deployment Battlemind Training was already mandated Army-wide as part of post-deployment cycle support program, but the MEDCOM transition plan expands the mandate to ensure a top

quality, integrated mental health training program across the deployment cycle.

USAMRU-E and Department of Psychiatry, WRAIR, have demonstrated the efficacy of post-deployment Battlemind training conducted at reintegration by comparing small and large group Battlemind to standard large-group post-deployment stress education. For those Soldiers with high levels of combat exposure, Battlemind Training I was associated with healthier adjustment 4 months later (protocol #862).

## Battlemind II Training Demonstrates Effect

In a study conducted with Soldiers who had been deployed to Iraq for a year, Battlemind Training II provided at 4 months post-deployment was compared to no training at all. In all, 629 Soldiers were randomly assigned to Battlemind Training or No Training and were surveyed again 6 months later. Controlling for rank, combat exposure, company-level effects, and pre-training health, Soldiers who received Battlemind Training reported better adjustment at follow-up:

- Lower post-traumatic stress
- Lower depression
- Less anger

In addition, immediately after completing the training Soldiers reported few concerns about stigma related to seeking mental health care (protocol #862).

Contrary to a report recently published by the American Psychological Association, the efficacy of Battlemind Training has been demonstrated in Army studies. Results will be presented at the 2007 meeting of the American Psychological Association in August.

## Battlemind Debriefing Guidelines

After WRAIR researchers demonstrated that psychological debriefing techniques at reintegration were associated with better mental health adjustment 4 months later, they developed a set of procedures for what is now termed Battlemind Debriefing. While there are some commonalities with other debriefing models, these procedures are specifically adapted for (1) in-theatre event-driven debriefing, (2) in-theatre time-driven debriefing, and (3) post-deployment debriefing. In addition, these procedures explicitly incorporate Battlemind concepts, ensuring Soldiers receive an integrated system of mental health training.

The procedures were provided to MEDCOM in FEB 07 and are now part of the Army’s Combat Operational Stress

Control course taught at the AMEDD Center and School.

The first course using the new procedures was taught in FEB 07. In addition,

Australian Army Psychologists were trained in Sydney by LTC Castro and MAJ McGurk (FEB 07).

The report is available on the unit’s website: Adler, A.B.,

Castro, C.A., & McGurk, D. (2007). Battlemind Psychological Debriefings. US Army Medical Research Unit-Europe Research Report 2007-001. Heidelberg, Germany: USAMRU-E.



## NCO Leaders Visit USAMRU-E

CSM Dixon, Medical Research and Materiel Command (MRMC) visited the unit on 5 JAN 07 and was briefed on the

unit by LTC Bliese with CPL Bargas and SPC Terry.



Left to Right: SPC Terry, CPT Cabrera, CSM Dixon, SSG Abrahamson, SGM Moore

CSM Dixon visited the unit again with CSM Moore, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, from 26-28 FEB 07 and received an updated unit brief and discussed NCO-related issues

(CPT Cabrera, SSG Abrahamson, SPC Terry).

## New Report Guides Assessment of Changes in Suicide Rates

USAMRU-E issued a new research tool to help identify statistically significant changes in suicide rates. The report is available on the unit’s web-site: <http://www.usamru-e.hqusareur.army.mil/>

Bliese, P.D., Adler, A.B., Wright, K.M., & Hoge, C.W. (2007). Procedure and guidelines for identifying significant spikes in suicide rates US Army Medical Research Unit-Europe Research Report 2007-002. Heidelberg, Germany: USAMRU-E.

## Committee Approves Study of Enhanced Battlemind

Empirically-driven mental health training is a cornerstone of USAMRU-E and the Division of Psychiatry and Neuroscience's (PN) research program. Thus far, the efficacy of post-deployment Battlemind Training has been demonstrated in two recent studies conducted by USAMRU-E and PN. The goal is now to enhance the efficacy of Battlemind training to help soldiers negotiate the challenge of adapting to life back home after a year of combat.

**New Protocol.** One potential method to enhance post-deployment mental health training is through expressive writing. Expressive writing has been demonstrated in a range of studies as an effective way to improve health and well-being outcomes. A new proposal by USAMRU-E researchers examines whether writing can enhance the post-deployment transition process.

In two separate meetings this quarter, the WRAIR's Human Use Review Committee (HURC) reviewed the proposal and approved the protocol (#1171). USAMRU-E and PN scientists were on-hand to respond to HURC questions (Dr. Adler & MAJ McGurk in DC 10 JAN 07; COL Hoge, LTC Bliese, & Dr. Adler 27 FEB 07).

**Early Coordination.** The study concept was introduced and discussed with rear detachment leaders in anticipation of a Brigade Combat Team's return to Germany following a year in Iraq. The team (LTC Bliese, Dr. Wright, Dr. Adler, and SSG Abrahamson) met with LTC Whittle, Commander, Rear Detachment, 2d BCT, and LTC Duecker, Commander, Schweinfurt Health Clinic, to discuss options (15 MAR 07).

## Constructing Advanced Battlemind



In support of a new protocol being co-developed by USAMRU-E and the Division of Psychiatry and Neuroscience (PN), several meetings were held to develop a 6-hour post-deployment training program. The training builds on the success of Battlemind and

expands on basic Battlemind themes.

- A two-day meeting included COL Hoge, COL Castro, COL Milliken, MAJ McGurk from WRAIR PN, USAMRU-E's Dr. Adler and Dr. Wright, and Ms. Bruner, a nurse at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center (11-12 JAN 07).

- COL Castro, Dr. Adler and Dr. Wright continued development of the training materials (22 FEB 07).

## Report to Steering Committee

Recent findings from USAMRU-E were highlighted in this year's presentation to the external scientific steering committee (Dr. Brundage, COL Engel, Dr. Friedman, and CAPT Koffman) which met at the WRAIR (21 FEB 07). Findings included data on the assessment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) using the PTSD Checklist and the efficacy of post-deployment training (LTC Bliese, Dr. Adler & Dr. Wright).

## Getting Research in Shape

LTC Bliese participated in an annual discussion group with other researchers selected for their contributions to advances in organizational psychology. The discussions are designed to critique and strengthen projects in their early stages of development (Tampa, FL, 12-13 JAN 07).



## Coordinating with WRAIR

- Members of WRAIR's Department of Military Psychiatry, MAJ Thomas, Ms. Whitt, and SPC Baker, met with USAMRU-E staff in Heidelberg to review protocol files and data base management issues (23-25 JAN 07).
- LTC Bliese met with MAJ Thomas to review data analysis plans as part of several days spent at the WRAIR (16-19 JAN 07 and again on 27 FEB 07).
- LTC Bliese and Dr. Adler met with Mr. Balsinger, Director of Quality Activities, at the WRAIR (18 JAN & 27 FEB 07) to discuss USAMRU-E's 11 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which were then approved under WRAIR's new SOP development process.
- Dr. Adler met with COL Castro and MAJ McGurk to develop the Battlemind Debriefing Research Report (16 & 18 JAN 07).

## Consultation in USAREUR

- MAJ Yarvis, ACoS, Civil-Military Operations, 30<sup>th</sup> MED BDE, met with LTC Bliese, Dr. Wright and Dr. Adler to discuss recent WRAIR advances in PTSD early intervention in preparation of a chapter on Military Psychiatry (29 JAN 07).
- LTC Bliese and Dr. Wright met with COL Maher, Deputy Commander, Europe Regional Medical Command (ERMC), LTC Tryniszewski, Director, Soldier and Family Support Services, ERMC, and LTC Wright, Force Health Protection, ERMC, to discuss findings related to implementation and the timing of the Post-Deployment Health ReAssessment (PDHRA) program (2 MAR & 8 MAR 07).
- LTC Bliese presented the unit's work in psychological screening and post-deployment training to the staff of the Schweinfurt Medical Clinic at the invitation of the Clinic Commander, LTC Duecker (15 MAR 07).



## Community Service

- Ms. Michael, a reporter from AFN, interviewed staff members on PTSD symptoms at post-deployment (31 JAN 07; LTC Bliese, Dr. Adler, Dr. Wright).
- LTC Bliese served as a Senior Oral Judge for the Junior Science and Humanities Symposium held in Heidelberg (6 & 7 MAR 07)..

## Personnel Updates

- SSG Abrahamson arrived at USAMRU-E on 8 JAN 07 and assumed the NCOIC duties at the unit.
- CPL Bargas left the unit on 9 FEB 07 to take a position with HMEDDAC.
- Dr. (Ippolito) Lang was awarded a contract on modeling effort-reward imbalance experienced by activated reservists (5 MAR 07).

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