

INFORMATION PAPER

DASG-WTO
2 June 2008

SUBJECT: US Army Medical Command Ombudsman Program

1. Purpose. To provide information on the Ombudsman Program to the House Veteran Affairs Committee.

2. Facts.

a. The US Army Medical Command (MEDCOM) Ombudsman Program was established in April 2007 as a means to provide Warriors in Transition and their Families a mechanism to raise concerns/issues to a neutral and impartial mediator who could work with both local and command-wide resources to reach a resolution in an expeditious manner.

b. The Ombudsmen work under the supervision of the MEDCOM Medical Assistance Group (MMAG), which is subordinate to the Warrior Transition Office, Office of the Surgeon General. The MMAG collects reports; assists Ombudsmen with cases that require coordination with the MEDCOM senior staff; receives medically-related cases called into the Wounded Soldier Family Hotline to formulate a resolution plan with the Ombudsman; and ensures that all aspects of the OTSG/MEDCOM Policy regarding this program are carried out.

c. In August 2007, a centrally managed contract was executed to hire 24 Ombudsmen at 18 locations. Since then, the program has grown to 48 Ombudsmen at 29 locations. Two additional sites in Germany are expected to be in place by August 2008. A spreadsheet is attached showing locations, the number of Ombudsmen at each location and the cumulative number of cases worked through 30 May 2008.

d. In general, Ombudsmen are hired based upon the number of Soldiers assigned to a Warrior in Transition Unit (WTU). Workload and local command considerations are also taken into account in deriving at an appropriate ratio for a given location. The WTU population is constantly monitored and hiring action is initiated accordingly.

e. Since Ombudsmen work directly for the MMAG and are not under the supervision of the local WTU or Military Treatment Facility Commander, this insures an appropriate level of independence for the Ombudsman when handling Soldier complaints/issues. However, the Ombudsman works very close with the local command to leverage resources and capabilities. Moreover, a Soldier's request for anonymity is respected and all reports will have identifying information removed and his/her identity will only be known by the Ombudsman.

SUBJECT: USAMEDCOM Ombudsman Program in Support of Warriors in Transition

f. Newly hired Ombudsman attend a five-day orientation training course at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Subject matter experts provide information and training on a broad range of topics. The topics include WTU Operations, TRICARE, HIPAA, Suicide Prevention, Medical Regulating/Transfers, VA matters, Physical Disability System, Reserve Component Operations, role of the Soldier's "Triad" (Primary Care Manager, Nurse Case Manager and Squad Leader), finance/pay issues, Human Resource Command support, and TSGLI. Tours are also scheduled at the Brooke Army Medical Center Soldier Family Support Center and the world class Center for the Intrepid (CFI). Briefings are also presented by senior MTF and WTU staff. Another highlight of this training is an intense block of instruction regarding "risk communication" which includes aspects of dealing with difficult emotional situations and the people skills required in Ombudsman duties.

g. The candidates for Ombudsmen positions are carefully screened and vetted by senior, experienced personnel within the MAG. In most cases, they are hired from retired senior NCO ranks with previous Army Medical Department experience. To date, the ability to hire Ombudsman with this level of prior experience has proven invaluable to providing credible employees with the skills needed to help Soldiers and their Family members achieve speedy resolution to their complex issues.

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Approved by: COL R. Baker