

MCAS MIRAMAR RESPONSE TO THE IMPACT OF OPERATIONAL STRESS ON FAMILIES

Ruth Mushallo, MA
Director, Marine & Family Services

Nate Lowe, PhD, LMSW, CSAP
DDRP Manager



BACKGROUND

January 2007 – CMC Directed Wounded Marine and Family Support Forum – asked the question:

Have we adjusted our support programs to “wartime footing”, or are we doing “business as usual”?



To our Staff at Miramar

- Are you seeing increases in requests for services?
- Are the presenting problems different?
- What are the trends?
- Most important...can we meet the needs?
- Do we need more training to meet the needs?



Summary of responses

- Extremely high incidence of marital infidelity.
- Increases in requests because...”He’s not the same since he returned & he’s going back again. What will happen to our marriage?”
- Increase in gambling and financial problems.
- “My kids are really having a hard time with this. I don’t know how to deal with them. My son wouldn’t even talk to his dad the last time he came home & now he’s going back to Iraq again. We need help.”
- Alarming number of family members requesting substance abuse evaluations.
- Compulsive internet usage.



Program additions

- On-base Alcoholics Anonymous
- On-base Gamblers Anonymous
- MFLC Counselor does children's groups & spouse support groups
- Hourly child care and "Parent's Night Out"
- Substance abuse assessment and referral for family members



Operational Stress & Substance Abuse

- Average age of a Marine at marriage is 25
- Most are “young marriages” - i.e., less than 5 years
- Many have limited coping skills
- Lack of maturity
 - In new surroundings, away from families
 - Vulnerable, gullible and susceptible
 - Many have young children
- When spouse is deployed vulnerability is increased and the risk goes up, sometimes resulting in experimenting with illegal substances



Problem Summary

January 2006-May 2007

- 117 Clinical Assessments for family members with substance abuse related problems
- Ages ranged from 14 to 47



Relationship to Deployments

- 73 service members returned from Iraq to find a family member involved in substance abuse
- 44 service members were deployed when their family members sought treatment
- 30 service members had children affected by substance abuse and some children were removed from the home



Treatment Recommendations

- Treatment options: outpatient, intensive outpatient and residential
- 112 family members accepted recommendation
- 5 rejected any form of treatment intervention



Types of Substances Used

- 39 - Methamphetamine
- 26 – Marijuana
- 22 – Alcohol
- 8 – Ecstasy
- 6 – Cocaine
- 3 – Heroin
- 3 – Cocaine/Heroin
- 2 - LSD
- 1 – Ketamines
- 3 – Alcohol & Zanax
- 2 – Alcohol & Valium
- 1 – Alcohol & Cocaine
- 1 – Alcohol & other meds
- 1 – Paint Thinner
- 1 - GHB



Continuing Challenges with Substance Abuse

- Follow up after treatment. Will the service member be deployed again? Will there be a repeat? Relapse?
- Lack of structure in new found recovery
- Finding new friends
- Staying strong without daily support/contact with deployed spouse



Action Plan

Continue to evaluate our
community and add/expand services
to meet local needs

