



COURAGE TO CARE



A HEALTH PROMOTION CAMPAIGN FROM
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FOSTERING RECOVERY *From Medical Illness, Injury and Disease*

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Providers are very familiar with the course of a disease. The course of recovery is a related perspective but focuses us as providers and patients on health rather than disease. Sustaining the health of our military community requires attention to both perspectives. War injuries can bring unique challenges to recovery. Battlefield injuries occur far from home and require multiple layers of medical care, provided across

vast distances and over time. Injured soldiers and their families may be at major medical facilities far from their home.

Recovery has a course and “tempo”. Recovery from the same illness, injury or disease varies between individuals. Recovery can be quick, with good return of function, or it can be extended and require extensive interventions and result in only a

limited return of function.

Recovery is affected by: the degree of injury, illness or disease; the demands of the treatment; the patient’s willingness to engage in treatment; family involvement in the care and recovery; and, the support of friends.

What are the primary messages that can help our service members and their families in the recovery process?

Hope

Hope is the cornerstone of recovery that sustains one’s belief in and expectation of a return to a normal or a familiar state of functioning. Healthcare providers are influential in the patient’s interpretation of his/her injury and trajectory of recovery. It is important to acknowledge loss and change in terms of functioning and emotion, but how this is communicated is critical. There is a difference between saying, “We will look for you to be able to walk in a few months” and “We think you may not be able to walk for a long time.” Consider how you phrased your last communication around recovery to a patient and his or her family, and its potential impact.

Support

Support from friends, buddies and family increases hope, lends perspective on past experiences and what worked, and provides needed assistance. Sustained support is essential, and changes throughout the recovery process. Families and friends can learn about how they can assist — emotionally and practically — in the recovery process of their loved one. Often this requires some direct questions that may seem embarrassing for a spouse, significant other or friend to ask, and the patient may initially be reluctant

to hear. “How can I help you get to the bathroom?” “Where can I get your groceries for you while you rest?” Providers can initiate and encourage this dialogue to remove barriers to support.

Education

When patients learn about their medical condition and its management they feel more in control, less surprised by the process and can better help themselves. These tools of being in control, making things familiar and developing skills to help oneself are key to accomplishing the tasks of recovery and sustaining realistic optimism about what can be accomplished. This is true for families as well who often hear about the medical condition before the patient. Educating patients and their families is a process that requires patience and calibrating the flow of information to accommodate where they are in the process. The inevitable anxiety patients and families experience often inhibits them from hearing and retaining information. When possible, provide important information through handouts or reputable sources of information. Establishing a relationship with patients and families that fosters feedback and communication can greatly improve the prognosis for both physical and mental health conditions.

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Self Reliance and Personal Strength: Empowerment

Recovery and empowerment go hand in hand. As patients recover, they benefit from opportunities to be self-reliant and to undertake achievable tasks. Often even small tasks bring a sense of return of normal life and a sense that “things are getting better”. When possible, the patient and family should resume their everyday routines and activities. Return of the normal roles and rhythm in the family brings a sense of familiarity, comfort and healing. Renewed strength and growth in handling adversity and acknowledging support from others can be a direct benefit.

Reinjury

Reinjury is a risk that can occur from something as simple as the common cold to something more complex such as hip replacement. Recovery is always a balancing act involving patient self-awareness, family support and realistic expectations and goals. Some individuals may rush their recovery because they do not like being thought of as “sick” while others may prolong their recovery out of fear of reentry. In some instances this can lead to loss of muscle mass, functionality and hope. Reinjury is an important part of recovery that must be taken into consideration.

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COURAGE TO CARE is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University. Its purpose is two-fold: to provide quality health information reflecting our University's excellence in military medicine and to present it in a friendly, appealing format for immediate distribution for the health promotion needs in your community.

