



# **USAF Chaplain Corps Risk and Resiliency**

## **Pre-exposure Preparation “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”**

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# Pre-exposure Preparation

- Chaplain Corps personnel hear and see humanity at its saddest, cruelest, most abject points
- Compassion Fatigue (Figley)
  - Vicarious Traumatization (Pearlman), secondary trauma (Munroe)
  - Symptoms can resemble ASD, PTSD, MDD.
    - Intrusive cognitions, nightmares, changes in perception
    - Feeling numb, sad,
    - Anger and Irritability
    - Hypervigilance
  - Personal trauma history may increase risk for developing compassion fatigue

# Pre-exposure Preparation

- Vicarious Traumatization is the cumulative effect upon the trauma worker of working with survivors
  - It is a transformation in the internal experience of the trauma worker that comes about as a result of engaging with trauma material
- It is an inevitable effect of trauma work
  - The Cost of Empathy (Pearlman)
  - The degree to which you are responsible and committed to your work; the degree of your empathy and desire to help is your degree of susceptibility.

# Pre-exposure Preparation

- USAF Chaplain Corps Risk and Resiliency (2009)
  - Resiliency refers to specific personality traits that enable people to thrive in spite of negative circumstances.
  - Protective factors are indicators that have a positive effect on a person's self-esteem and development.
  - Nature of role increases exposure
  - Can lead to changes in appraisal of faith or God
    - Changes in faith were positively associated with CF and with PCL-M scores.
    - Additionally, both counseling and combat-related stressors correlated positively with changes in faith.
    - Vast majority experienced posttraumatic stress growth
    - However, some experienced degradation or disruption of faith

# Pre-exposure Preparation

## ***Combat Stressors***

<b><u>Combat Event</u></b>	<b><u>% Reporting</u></b>
✓ Participated in convoys	25.5
✓ Encountered IEDs, snipers, etc.	41.8
✓ Received incoming hostile fire	61.4
✓ Vehicle fired on	8.7
✓ Attacked by insurgents or civilians	29.9
✓ Part of unit that fired on enemies	30.4
✓ Part of unit that suffered casualties	57.6
✓ Personally witnessed service members wounded or killed	47.3
✓ Personally witnessed civilians or insurgents wounded or killed	40.2
✓ Was wounded or injured	1.1
✓ Saw homes or villages that had been destroyed	26.6
✓ Saw refugees	30.4
✓ Interacted with enemy combatants who were taken prisoner	9.2
✓ Exposed to wounded or dead animals	10.3
✓ Assisted in handling dead bodies	35.9
✓ Exposed to dying people	47.3
✓ Saw wounded or disfigured civilians or enemy combatants	40.8
✓ Saw wounded or disfigured service members	60.3
✓ Saw bodies of dead service members	46.7
✓ Identified body of service member	1.6

# Pre-exposure Preparation

## ***Counseling Stressors***

<b><u>Counseling Event</u></b>	<b><u>% Reporting</u></b>
✓ <b>Counseled grieving service members</b>	<b>66.8</b>
✓ <b>Counseled suicidal service members</b>	<b>68.5</b>
✓ <b>Counseled seriously injured or dying service members</b>	<b>57.1</b>
✓ <b>Counseled service members struggling with moral injury</b>	<b>39.1</b>
✓ <b>Counseled service members about loss of faith</b>	<b>35.3</b>
✓ <b>Provided religious rites to the dying</b>	<b>35.9</b>
✓ <b>Counseled service members who were in danger of being wounded or killed</b>	<b>28.8</b>
✓ <b>Counseled service members who experienced incoming fire</b>	<b>23.4</b>
✓ <b>Counseled wounded/disfigured service members</b>	<b>23.4</b>
✓ <b>Counseled service members who involved in operations resulting in loss of life and limb</b>	<b>23.4</b>
✓ <b>Counseled service members who saw dead bodies</b>	<b>20.1</b>
✓ <b>Counseled service members who received friendly fire</b>	<b>7.6</b>

# Pre-exposure Preparation

## ➤ Protective Factors

- Spirituality, Religiosity
- Education and Training (what's "normal"? What are the signs and symptoms? What are the protective factors? What are the risk factors? When should I be concerned?" When should I refer? When should I self refer?)
- Exercise
- Experience
- Positive personal relationships
- "Wingman" for ventilation
- Rest and play
- Acceptance of pain
- Preserve hope – for yourself and others
- Plan "escapes"

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”

## Objectives

- Chaplain Corps Priority - Care for our Caregivers
- Opportunity to “Tell your Story” to Colleagues
- “Pain shared is pain divided, Joy shared is joy multiplied” (“On Combat” D. Grossman)
- Rest, Reflect undistracted, Rejuvenate, Heal
- Have fun
- Collegial Support
- Retreat v. Training



# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”

## History of the Program

- First Event: May 2008
- 6 Retreats held
- 157 attendees
- Optimum attendance – 30/Retreat
- Religious Support Team concept
- Schedule 60-90 days post-redeployment
- Plan 6 events for CY2010

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”

## Program Format

- Informal – Relaxed Group Dynamic; attire
- Tuesday – Thursday event; Mon, Fri Travel Days
- Short Days
- Primarily Small Group interaction
- Limited education/training
- Location, Location, Location
- Set group at ease early
- Power of appropriate humor
- Journaling

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats

## Rules of Engagement

- Communication Stays in the Room
- Non-attribution
- Member only

## Facilitation Team

- Chaplain – Chaplain Assistant RST in front
  - Recently redeployed
  - Recently attended Caregiver Retreat
- Chaplain – Chaplain Assistant RST in support
  - Professional Counseling Observer (Family Life trained)
  - Logistics, Chaplain Assistant Caregiver

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats

## Lessons Learned

- Retreat v. Training
- Trust your professional caregivers
- Invest in them, ask them to invest in themselves
- Facilitators must be credible/recently deployed
- Make it a truly unique TDY
- Incorporate journaling
- Group Dynamic
- Avoid re-traumatizing
- Give a gift

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”

## Day 1

- Ice Breaker – Small Groups, “most humorous deployment experience”
- Expectations – What do I want from this... what do I not want from this...
- Journaling and Small Groups
  - Where have you been?
  - Where are you now?
  - Where would you like to be?
- Large Groups – Chaplains/Chaplain Assistants
  - Share a summary of your deployment

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”

## Day 2

- Facilitators share their story
- Self Assessment – PTSD Checklist (PCL-M)
- Small Groups – Deployment Experiences
- Journaling – What memories still cause you pain?  
Can you talk about them?
- Small Groups – What did you see that inspired you—  
wholesome, heroic, overcoming adversity?

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”

## Day 3

- “Resilience” Discussion
- Training – Stress and Physiological Response
- Journaling and Small Group
  - What experiences brought anger into your life?
  - What experiences brought joy into your life?
  - Where was God in your deployment?
- Journaling and Small Groups
  - Re-visit “Where have you been”?
  - Re-visit “Where are you now”?
  - Re-visit “Where would you like to be”?
- Liturgy/Ceremony of Healing
- Feedback

# “Caregiver Reintegration Retreats”

## Feedback

- “The location is nice. I appreciate all the folks and the hard work to put this together. It was a great break. I encourage others to come. **Many times we don't know we need a retreat until we have been on one.** Thanks to the Chaplain Corps for affording the opportunity to receive “care for the caregiver”!”



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