



# MINDLINES

## *Caring for the Caregiver*

*By Cmdr. Jean Fisak, NC, USN  
Deputy Director, NCCOSC*

Being a caregiver is incredibly rewarding. From helping a battle-weary Marine recover from psychological trauma to performing a life-saving operation on a child as part of a humanitarian mission, the good work we do globally for Navy Medicine is like no other. We make a difference in people's lives.

As caregivers, our jobs provide a level of fulfillment and satisfaction that you'd be hard-pressed to find in other careers. But, there's also a degree of stress that is unique to our profession, particularly those of us who are active duty. After all, when it comes to health care, people's lives and well-being hang in the balance. And when it comes to being in the military, we have the added stress of deployments and moving every few years. The responsibility and challenges can really weigh on you.

What's unique about caregiver stress is that not only do we have our own occupational stress to manage, but there's also the risk of absorbing the stress and vicariously experiencing the trauma of those we care for, adding to our own burden.

Caregivers, by our nature, are compassionate and dedicated to meeting the needs of others. We can be so committed to our work that we neglect our own needs and ignore our own stress. When this happens, we risk burning out and developing our own stress injuries. Ultimately, this can impact the quality of our work, leading to medical errors and jeopardizing the well-being of those

entrusted to our care. Our stress may become so overwhelming that we even forget why we became caregivers in the first place.

To address these concerns, the Naval Center for Combat & Operational Stress Control (NCCOSC) has developed a standardized, comprehensive Caregiver Occupational Stress Control (CgOSC) program. While the core concepts of CgOSC are not new, the establishment of a formal program that will be implemented across Navy Medicine is.

CgOSC, a variation of the Combat & Operational Stress Control (COSC) doctrine, is designed to foster resilience, strengthen unit cohesion, and develop supportive work environments for caregivers. The three core objectives are early recognition of distress, peer intervention, and connecting caregivers with appropriate support services. The goal is to support increased job satisfaction, reduce burnout and compassion fatigue, promote retention, prepare military caregivers for the operational and occupational demands of their profession, and improve the quality and safety of patient care.

No matter what your caregiver role – mental health professional, nurse, physician, hospital corpsman, chaplain – being able to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress in yourself or your peers

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# Hospital Corpsmen *Cope with Stress*

During RIMPAC 2014

USNS Mercy recently arrived back in her homeport of San Diego following Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2014. We sat down with a few hospital corpsmen who were there, to find out what it was like, and how they coped with the stress of the experience.



 **HN Andrew Kehm**  
Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS D)

**Q:** What was your role onboard the Mercy during RIMPAC?

**A:** I worked in the ICU. I did some patient care, but also a

lot of training and mass casualty drills, as well as giving tours to foreign nationals. There were also a lot of training exercises with the Chinese navy.

**Q:** *What was it like?*

**A:** It was great to work in a patient care setting again. At NMCS D as the Health Insurance Portability and Accounting Act (HIPAA) Specialist, I don't work with patients too much. So it was good to revisit some skills I haven't used in a while. It was a great experience and I was very grateful for the opportunity.

**Q:** *Was it stressful, and why?*

**A:** Yes, because being on a ship is different from what I'm used to. There are so many things you need to do in a certain amount of time. Also working with other countries was different. I enjoyed building that connection and comparing my job in the US Navy to theirs. It was definitely a unique experience but very stressful.

**Q:** *What did you do to cope with that stress?*

**A:** I listened to music, and focused on the job at hand, telling myself 'it'll be over soon,' and I just stuck with it.

**Q:** *Why is it important for caregivers to manage their stress?*

**A:** We need to be in the best mental and physical shape in order to support those who need our care. How can we take care of others when we cannot take care of ourselves?





 **HM3 Jose Trevino**  
**Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS)**

**Q:** *What was your role onboard the Mercy during RIMPAC?*

**A:** I was a part of the first surgical team—the equivalent of the ER here at NMCS.

**Q:** *What was it like?*

**A:** Coming from a clinic environment it was a good refresher, it showed me what it's like to be a real corpsman—I haven't used my emergency medicine knowledge since I was at Naval Hospital Okinawa.

**Q:** *Was it stressful, and why?*

**A:** Sometimes, yes. There were so many people trying to take charge—doctors, nurses, corpsmen—so it got kind of crazy. It was so fast-paced and required me to do things I didn't know or couldn't remember how to do. But I took away a lot of experience and learned a lot from the other medical personnel on the ship. It really forced me to be a better corpsman.

**Q:** *What did you do to cope with that stress?*

**A:** Worked out. A lot. When I would have an off day where I was just feeling tired or stressed out, a couple hours to myself made a big difference, whether I used it to lift weights, run, just get away, watch a movie in the lounge and have a laugh, or talk with my leadership about what was going on.



**Q:** *Were you able to identify or support other caregivers with their stress while underway?*

**A:** Yes—a few times I noticed my leading petty officer (LPO) or assistant leading petty officer (ALPO) was looking stressed or tired, and I would just tell them, “go relax, take a nap, you need a break, I've got this.”

**Q:** *Why is it important for caregivers to manage their stress?*

**A:** Because if I get too stressed and I'm not paying attention, I could miss something. Even if it's something small, it could turn into something big later and put that patient's life in danger.

**Above:** Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Jose Trevino examines an adult life support trainer mannequin during mass casualty disaster training. **Opposite page:** HN Andrew Kehm observes as Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Larry Calvert (center) examines a mock patient during the final day of training for a pre-hospital trauma life support course. Images photography by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Justin W. Galvin aboard the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) during Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2014.

**Above left:** The Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) in San Diego harbor.



## Caregiver Occupational Stress Control

# The Missing Piece of the Puzzle

**N**AVY MEDICINE HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS HAVE A UNIQUE ROLE. Not only do they provide patient care, but they often do so in austere, dangerous, or otherwise demanding environments. Faced with these two sets of challenges, it's easy for providers to become so consumed by putting the puzzle of patient care together, that they might miss one very important piece—themselves.

That's where a Navy Medicine initiative known as Caregiver Occupational Stress Control (CgOSC) comes into play. The mission of CgOSC is to provide a standardized program to help teach early identification of stress reactions and intervene before injuries occur among caregivers. Other goals are to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health care, educate providers on ways to practice self-care, and improve resilience.

Tasked with the roll-out of the CgOSC initiative across the Navy Medicine enterprise, Naval Center for Combat & Operational Stress Control (NCCOSC) staff traveled to Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, the first Navy medical facility to receive the CgOSC training.

Capt. Rick Freedman, Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune's commanding officer, said there's a clear need for this training at the hospital. "I believe our exceptional staff were drawn to medicine, and Navy Medicine in particular, because of a tremendous inner desire to take care of others and serve something bigger than themselves," said Freedman. "That level of effort, drive, and commitment can, unfortunately, start to sap away at our staff's energy, inner reserve, and resilience. Caregiver stress and burnout can reduce efficiency and lead to a greater likelihood of errors. That same inner calling that led our people to a life of service, that keeps them highly attuned and responsive to others' needs, often makes them unaware of the personal demands and cost of that commitment. Building resilience is key to mitigating the negative impacts of that stress."

It really is a win-win situation for all. Says Freedman, "Reducing caregiver stress will increase safety for the patient, contribute to the overall patient experience, and leave the caregiver with energy and compassion to care for the patient."

Citing Navy Medicine's stress continuum, which identifies the "zone" a Sailor or Marine is in based on his or her ability to cope in a stressful situation—green, yellow, orange, or red; or ready, reacting, injured, or ill, respectively—Freedman added that a caregiver in the yellow or orange zone has fewer personal resources available to treat a patient.

"A reliable CgOSC team, will be a great resource to moderate risks and help rebuild their strength, their reserve, and their resiliency," he said.

The training NCCOSC provided has already made an impact. Feedback on the training was exceptional, revealed Freedman and, according to a post-training survey, 100 percent of attendees thought the training was valuable and high-quality, giving it a rating of "Good" to "Excellent."

"Each and every one of our 2,400 staff at Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune are caregivers... all keenly focused on our mission: the health of our beneficiaries and the readiness of our operational forces," said Freedman. Leadership "is committed to serving this incredible team, while making certain that we take care of our most valuable resource: our people." 🇺🇸





# Happy Foods for a Festive Holiday

The holiday season is fast approaching, and with it come celebrations with family and friends, gift exchanging, and hordes of delicious food.

For some, however, the holiday season brings with it feelings of homesickness and loneliness when they are separated from loved ones, whether deployed or just stationed far from home. Here's some food for thought: if you find yourself having a 'blue Christmas,' look no further than your holiday dinner to lift your spirits.

Turkey is well-known for its ability to make you feel relaxed and happy. That's because it's jam-packed with something called *tryptophan*. In a National Institutes of Health study on how tryptophan affects the brain and body, researchers found that tryptophan plays a key role in the production of serotonin, a chemical created in the brain and intestines. Serotonin acts as a neurotransmitter and, since it affects the majority of the cells in your brain, it has the ability to affect your psychological health as well—most notably, your mood.

Those same researchers went a step further and found when your body is lacking sufficient levels of tryptophan, your memory might suffer and you could experience a decrease in cognitive flexibility, which we here at NCCOSC know is critical to resilience, because it affects your ability to find the good in a bad situation. That ability to look past the challenges in the road ahead is especially important when loneliness, homesickness, and depression rear their heads around the holidays.

But it's not just turkey that can help give your holiday spirits a lift. Another good tryptophan-producing food source can be found pulling the sleigh of one very jolly red-suited man. Reindeer, also known as caribou, is a great source of tryptophan. If you're not much for meat—and you'd prefer not to eat a member of Santa's delivery crew—load up your plate with some tofurkey; the soybeans found in this vegetarian-friendly meat-substitute can help give you the boost you need.

Whatever your meat-eating preferences, don't forget a small helping of Grandma's baked macaroni and cheese or Mom's



homemade mashed potatoes. A light serving of carbs like these can help convert the tryptophan in that turkey, caribou, or tofurkey into the serotonin you need to combat the stress and emotions brought on by the holidays. Add some chocolate for an extra helping of that happy hormone—just make sure it's the dark variety!

So, if your holiday season isn't shaping up to be as happy as you'd hoped, the solution might be as close as your dinner table. But, if you find that isn't enough, don't be afraid to ask for help. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), Military OneSource at 1-800-342-9647, or seek out a friend, coworker, or chaplain. We are your family and we want you to have a safe and happy holiday season. 🍷

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*L-Tryptophan: Basic Metabolic Functions, Behavioral Research and Therapeutic Indications.* Retrieved from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2908021/>; *What is serotonin? What does serotonin do?* Retrieved from: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/232248.php>; *The Turkey-Tryptophan Myth.* Retrieved from: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/prefrontal-nudity/201111/the-turkey-tryptophan-myth>; *Why Your Diet Can Make or Break Depression Recovery.* Retrieved from: <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2014/01/08/why-your-diet-can-make-or-break-depression-recovery/>; *Chocolate and Mood Disorders.* Retrieved from: <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2009/04/27/chocolate-and-mood-disorders/>



## DATES TO REMEMBER

**Oct. 13, 1775:** On this date, the Continental Congress established the Continental Navy to seek out British ships supplying munitions to the British Army in America. While the ships were sold and all seamen and officers were released at the end of the Revolutionary War, when the Constitution was ratified in 1798, Congress was empowered “to provide and maintain a navy.” In 1972, this date was officially recognized as the Navy’s birthday.



**Nov. 10, 1903:** On this day, William A. Hunt is born. He would become the U.S. Navy’s first clinical psychologist and develop a brief psychological screening for Navy recruits.



**Nov. 10, 1775:** This date marks the birth of the United States Marine Corps, created to augment naval forces during the Revolutionary War. The Tun Tavern in Philadelphia, known as the birthplace of the Marines, is where Capt. Samuel Nicholas (left) set up recruiting efforts.



## BUSTED

**Myth:** People who talk about suicide aren’t really serious about it.

**Fact:** Most people who attempt or die by suicide give some type of warning. Even if someone seems to be joking around, if you notice a shipmate talking about feeling hopeless or saying things like “I wish I were dead,” take them seriously and ACT!

- **Ask** them how they are.
- Show them that you **care**.
- Help them get the **treatment** they need to get better.

(Source: “Navy Suicide Prevention: The Truth About Sailors and Suicide,” Navy Personnel Command)



## IN THE KNOW

### What is Compassion Fatigue?

Do you know what **compassion fatigue** is? Here’s a hint: it doesn’t mean you’re tired of being compassionate. Compassion fatigue is a chronic, long-term exhaustion and traumatic stress injury associated with reliving the suffering of the person you are caring for. And it’s not just something that affects medical professionals – anyone who spends time regularly caring for another can develop it.

differently and can tolerate different amounts of it, but there are four factors that seem to contribute to compassion fatigue among caregivers:

- Poor self-care skills
- Previous unresolved psychological trauma
- Inability or refusal to control work stressors
- Lack of satisfaction with work

### How can you tell if you, or someone you know, suffers from compassion fatigue?

Individual response to compassion fatigue can vary from person to person, but common symptoms include:

- Hopelessness
- Problems sleeping/nightmares
- Constant stress and anxiety
- Poor concentration
- Intrusive thoughts

### How do you manage compassion fatigue?

- **Step 1: Self-care.** Regular exercise, proper nutrition, social connections and enjoyable activities all play a role in helping caregivers manage stress and build resilience.
- **Step 2: Know when to reach out for help.** When self-care isn’t working, the best thing you can do for yourself and those you are caring for is to get help. If you don’t take care of your own health and well-being, you won’t be able to take care of anyone else.



### Why do I need to know about compassion fatigue?

With advances in military medicine and a high battlefield survival rate, the number of patients with traumatic injuries, physical and psychological, has increased. An increase in patient load – especially of critically injured patients – puts caregivers at risk for developing compassion fatigue. Creating awareness of this type of stress injury means we can work together to identify caregivers who are stressed and make sure they get help.

### Is anyone more likely to develop compassion fatigue?

Everyone is affected by stress

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for updates about compassion fatigue and caregiver stress.



## RESEARCH ROUNDUP



### Building a Better Battle Buddy

Unit cohesion and positive leadership are vital to mission readiness. We even know that unit cohesion is associated with a decreased risk of suicidal ideation, enhanced well-being and greater psychological resilience. A white paper published by NCCOSC took a look at the psychology behind these topics and found that when military members don't feel supported, cared for or trusted by their leaders, they're placed at greater risk for:

- Reduced morale and self-esteem
- Distress
- Conflict and tension
- Alcohol-related issues
- Decrease in job satisfaction and retention
- Workplace hostility
- Lack of commitment to unit or mission

Conversely, when leaders trust their troops, genuinely care about their professional development and personal well-being, and don't feel the need to hover or micro-manage, this often results in a decreased risk for:

- Anger
- Depression

- PTSD
  - Suicidal ideations
- ...as well as an increase in:
- Job satisfaction and retention
  - Psychological functioning and resiliency
  - Combat readiness
  - Discipline
  - Overall improved well-being

Mission readiness is everyone's responsibility. It's up to each individual to lend a hand to a fellow team member in need. It's up to leaders to provide opportunities for troops to become familiar with each other, be vigilant of morale and any issues that may affect unit or individual readiness, and motivate their troops not with rewards, but with the satisfaction of a job well done and pride in their accomplishments. Whether we're looking to prevent suicide, decrease caregiver stress, or improve overall readiness, the combination of good leadership and strong unit cohesion is really a winning formula for enhancing the quality of military life.



## FAST FACTS

### *Who Do You Talk to When You're Stressed?*

A recent program evaluation conducted by our Research Facilitation Department with a large group of Marines found that most would prefer to talk with friends, family, and fellow service members when they are dealing with stress and are least likely to speak to leaders and chaplains.



## RESOURCES FOR HELP IN A CRISIS

If you or someone you know is struggling with overwhelming stress, feelings of hopelessness or suicidal thoughts, help is available. The military provides several resources that can help you in a moment of crisis and provide additional resources. Reach out. Ask for help. Get better.

#### **Military Crisis Line – 1-800-273-8255 (press 1)**

The Military Crisis Line provides confidential support by phone, text or online, 24/7, 365 days a year. The crisis line is staffed by qualified responders, many of whom are veterans and understand the challenges and struggles experienced by service members.

#### **Navy Chaplains**

Navy chaplains are a confidential source of support and guidance for Sailors and Marines, especially when experiencing distress. They are available 24/7 and all active and reserve Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen can find a chaplain through Navy 311.

- Phone: 1-855-NAVY-311 (1-855-628-9311)
- Email: [navy311@navy.mil](mailto:navy311@navy.mil)
- Text: [navy311@navy.mil](mailto:navy311@navy.mil) in the "to" line
- Online: [www.navy311.mil](http://www.navy311.mil)



## Caring for the Caregiver

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and effectively manage it is important. Because if we, as caregivers, can't take care of ourselves and each other, how can we take care of our patients safely and effectively?

The first step to managing stress is recognizing it. Stress causes physiological changes in the brain and body, and prolonged stress can negatively impact overall health. Physical stress symptoms include:

- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Muscle tension
- Suppressed immune system (resulting in physical illnesses)

Every individual is unique and we all tolerate stress differently, but common psy-

chological symptoms of stress may include:

- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, nightmares)
  - Panic attacks
  - Irritability
  - Memory loss
  - Poor concentration
  - Social withdrawal
  - Persistent feelings of guilt or shame
  - Absenteeism
- or activities that you enjoy and make time for them, even if you have to schedule them into your day. Healthy outlets that take your mind off work are great stress busters.
- Nurture yourself. Make time for adequate sleep, eat nutritious foods, and exercise regularly.
  - Nurture your soul. Whether you practice a specific religion or you take solace in nature, finding time to focus on your spirit can help restore you. Learning mindfulness techniques – meditation or deep-breathing exercises – can build resilience.
  - Nurture your connections. Make time to enjoy activities with friends and family. Strong relationships provide support and comfort during stressful times.
  - Find your passion. Identify hobbies

Throughout Navy Medicine, we work hard to ensure our wounded warriors receive the best care and treatment available. We, as the caregivers who support their healing and recovery, deserve no less. By implementing CgOSC and best practices to alleviate caregiver stress, by learning to care for ourselves and our colleagues, we can ensure that we are always ready and resilient to carry out the mission of Navy Medicine and take care of our Sailors and Marines. 🇺🇸

Caregivers aren't just medical personnel. Those who provide care for our wounded, ill and injured service members include chaplains, religious program specialists, family service personnel, and even friends and family members.

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- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, nightmares)
- Panic attacks
- Irritability
- Memory loss
- Poor concentration
- Social withdrawal
- Persistent feelings of guilt or shame
- Absenteeism

Once we're aware of stress and recognize its presence in ourselves or coworkers, we need to take action. By caring for ourselves, we can prevent stress injuries from developing into more serious physical or mental health concerns and build our

or activities that you enjoy and make time for them, even if you have to schedule them into your day. Healthy outlets that take your mind off work are great stress busters.

- Find your balance. Strive for a healthy work-life balance. Make it a point to leave work at work so you can focus on friends and family when you're with them. Make time for yourself as well as your favorite activities.
- Ask for help. Seek the help of a qualified professional if stress symptoms aren't manageable with self-care. There are times when even caregivers need treatment from medical and mental health professionals.

**On the Cover:** Photo-illustration by Joe Griffin.

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**Public Affairs Officer/Dept. Head**  
Amy Rohlfs

**Senior Strategic Communications Specialist**  
Regena Kowitz

**Junior Strategic Communications Specialist**  
Jessica Tounzen

**Senior Graphic Designer**  
Joe Griffin

[www.nccosc.navy.mil](http://www.nccosc.navy.mil)



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