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News Release

Government of Canada announces new measures improving support of ill and injured Canadian Forces personnel

NR 09.011 - March 2, 2009

HALIFAX – The Honourable Peter Gordon MacKay, Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, and the Honourable Greg Kerr, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, today announced the establishment of a national network of eight support centres dedicated to the care of ill and injured Canadian Forces (CF) personnel, former personnel, their families and the families of the deceased. The support centres, known as Integrated Personnel Support Centres (IPSCs), will operate under a single national CF unit headquartered in Ottawa, known as the Joint Personnel Support Unit (JPSU).

"This Government is committed to the health and well-being of Canada's soldiers, sailors, airmen, and airwomen," said Minister MacKay. "Whether returning to military life, or exploring a new civilian career, these members and their families will receive the assistance they need."

Minister MacKay and Mr. Kerr were on hand to officially launch the JPSU and its network of support centres along with an audience of senior officers, CF staff and their families.

"The Integrated Personnel Support Centres provide us with an opportunity to improve transition services already available on most CF bases across the country," said the Honourable Greg Thompson, Minister of Veterans Affairs, in Ottawa. "This partnership with our colleagues at DND will provide veterans and their families with more coordinated, seamless service."

The JPSU's support centres, or IPSCs, will coordinate a range of casualty support and case management programs; plan and monitor the Return to Work Program; provide Veterans Affairs Canada client and transition services; and liaise with local service providers, base support representatives and unit Commanding Officers. They will improve existing services by aligning progress on a member's file with one defined set of priorities.

The creation of the JPSU and its network of IPSCs is one of a number of concrete measures designed to respond to the December 2008 DND/CF Ombudsman's Report, "A Long Road to Recovery: Battling Operational Stress Injuries."

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Backgrounder

The Joint Personnel Support Unit

BG-09.006 - March 2, 2009

In the provision of care and support to its ill and injured personnel, the Canadian Forces (CF) are far ahead of where they were ten years ago. As part of an ongoing process to improve the level of services, the CF has established a network of eight support centres to meet the needs of ill and injured personnel from the Navy, Army and Air Force, providing them with an integrated "one-stop service." The support centres, known as Integrated Personnel Support Centres (IPSCs), operate under the Joint Personnel Support Unit (JPSU), which is headquartered in Ottawa.

The mandate of the JPSU is to respond to requests for support and report to the chain of command on issues of concern raised by ill and injured CF personnel. The JPSU accomplishes the following:

- It improves the quality of care and services provided to ill and injured CF personnel.
- It ensures that military personnel have access to the same high standard of care and support across the country.
- It reduces the potential for gaps, overlaps and confusion, ensuring that no CF member "falls through the cracks."
- As military personnel move frequently, the JPSU concept recognizes that people heal better and faster when they are close to their family and their social support network.
- The JPSU gives military personnel a new mission – to heal (recover), to regain their strength (rehabilitate) and to choose their best way forward (reintegrate).

The principal aim of this initiative is to ensure that all Regular Force and Reserve Force personnel and their families are provided an equitable level of care and support regardless of environment or location, through centralized command and control.

Services

The JPSU provides a CF/VAC integrated "one-stop service" for ill and injured CF personnel and their families. It supports currently serving and releasing CF personnel, both Regular Force and Reserve Force. It caters to both referrals and walk-in clients, to long-term injured personnel and to members considering retirement. It responds to queries from family members regarding support services and programs for ill and injured personnel, and provides referrals as appropriate.

The services made available through the JPSU include the following:

- Return to Work (RTW) Program coordination;
- Casualty tracking;
- Casualty administrative support and advocacy;
- CF Case Management;
- Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) financial services;
- Liaison with Military Family Resource Centres, local base support representatives and local unit Commanding Officers; and
- VAC client and transition services.

The JPSU improves on earlier initiatives in several key ways. It provides one-stop access to services and benefits, simplifying the process for clients seeking assistance. It reduces the potential for gaps and overlaps, and the potential for confusion among service providers. VAC staff become engaged earlier in a releasing member's transition process. Shared standards and guidelines lead to care and support which is consistent across departments (DND/CF and VAC); environments (Army, Navy, Air Force); components (Regular Force and Reserve Force); bases, wings and units; and the country.

Structure

The JPSU is the central military unit to which a number of Integrated Personnel Support Centres (IPSCs)

belong. The IPSCs will be located as follows:

- Vancouver, British Columbia;
- Edmonton, Alberta;
- Shilo, Manitoba;
- Toronto, Ontario;
- Petawawa, Ontario;
- Valcartier, Québec;
- Gagetown, New Brunswick; and
- Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Locations will open over the coming months. The individual IPSCs will be structured and staffed based on the size and relative needs of the population they serve. Approximately 117 new Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions will be filled across Canada.

A Realignment of Resources

The delivery of casualty support services at the base, wing and formation level has been occurring for as long as the CF has been training and employing members and sending them into operational theatres and special duty operations. On the national level, new initiatives were launched in 1998 and again in 2007. While filling gaps in service, however, these did not comprehensively address the needs of the CF. In 2008, the Chief of Military Personnel (CMP) recommended the stand-up of casualty support units which would provide a consistent level of care for all CF personnel. The Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) accepted this recommendation, and announced the intent to further enhance casualty support by establishing centrally managed units across the country.

Leadership recognized that the earlier system of care management was complex, and that simplifying it would benefit personnel in need. The JPSU provides CF personnel and their families with coordinated, seamless and integrated care when illnesses or injuries occur, and through the stages of recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration into military or civilian life and employment.

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Backgrounder

The Canadian Forces Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Program

BG – 09.007 - March 2, 2009

The Canadian Forces (CF) strive to be responsive to the evolving needs of their members. CF Health Services is therefore revitalizing its Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation program in order to meet the changing needs of military personnel.

The new program will develop around seven centres of expertise, located on CF bases and affiliated with nearby civilian providers:

- CFB Esquimalt partnered with the Victoria General Hospital Rehabilitation Unit in Victoria, B.C., and the G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre in Vancouver, B.C.;
- CFB Edmonton partnered with the Glenrose Rehabilitation Centre in Edmonton, Alta.
- CFB Shilo-Winnipeg partnered with the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre and the Riverview Rehabilitation Centre;
- CFB Petawawa-NCR partnered with the Pembroke Rehabilitation Centre in Pembroke, Ont., and the Royal Ottawa Regional Rehabilitation Centre in Ottawa, Ont.;
- CFB Valcartier partnered with the Institut de Réadaptation en Déficience Physique de Québec, Quebec City, Que.;
- CFB Gagetown partnered with the Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation in Fredericton, N.B. (and other rehabilitation facilities in St. John and Moncton as required for amputee care); and
- CFB Halifax partnered with the Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre in Halifax, N.S.

There will be no significant differences in quality of care among the seven locations, but every facility will have a special focus. Many of these partnerships already exist on an informal level. CF Health Services aims to have the entire program in place and operational by fall 2009.

CF Health Services recognizes that an important determinant of a positive outcome from rehabilitation is the proximity of family and other social support networks. Sometimes the member's parent unit proves the most important source of inspiration and motivation; when the ill and injured are left in the hands of civilian providers with insufficient uniformed contact, they risk losing connection and morale. The existence of seven centres of expertise will ensure that all military personnel who have sustained life-altering injuries or illness receive the optimal level of rehabilitation services possible, as close to home and unit as possible.

Once established, the new centres of expertise will work in concert with a number of other key programs and initiatives aimed at caring for, supporting, managing and employing ill and injured personnel. This comprehensive and integrated approach will not only provide personnel recovering from illness or injury with top notch health care services, but will also ensure that they have access to administrative support, peer support, assistance with reintegration into the workplace, support services for their families, and help in preparing for transition to civilian life if and when the time comes.

Roles and responsibilities

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Services is charged with the rehabilitation and maintenance of operationally deployable forces wherever and whenever CF personnel serve. Rehabilitation of ill and injured personnel is aimed at restoring patients to their optimal level of functioning. It takes place in a wide range of in-patient and out-patient environments and is provided by an array of health care specialists, depending on the needs of the individual.

The incidence of muscular and skeletal conditions and injuries in military populations is well documented

and is a major concern for the CF. Research suggests that as much as 35-45% of all routine medical appointments are related to these conditions. Military personnel work within unique environmental factors, equipment and time constraints, in awkward postures in restricted spaces with poor ergonomic designs, in tasks involving frequent reaching, repetition, heavy material handling and exposure to vibration, all of which puts them at higher risk of injury.

On a daily basis, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation staff are asked to assess a range of muscular and skeletal conditions; to provide physiotherapy interventions; to prescribe and fit a variety of assistive devices, orthotics (braces) and prostheses and to train recipients in their use; to provide injury management education; to facilitate ergonomic and workstation evaluations; to determine temporary job and training limitations; and to advise chain of command on injury risk factors and injury rates and patterns.

Physiotherapists deploy with the troops, working with them during operational training, physical training and operational tasks, with a focus on early intervention, the prevention of injuries and health promotion. When CF personnel return from deployment, physiotherapists are there to respond to soft tissue injury, muscle imbalances, overuse injuries, back and neck pain and the results of inflammatory and degenerative diseases, and to manage post-surgical care, physical trauma, sprains and breaks, and serious limb damage. In a small number of cases, they deal with limb loss requiring prostheses.

Medical and rehabilitation services and support are provided to the same standard for all ill and injured CF personnel regardless of the circumstances of their illness or injury.

Injuries in theatre

When a CF member is injured in theatre, the stages in the process of care and rehabilitation are typically as follows.

- Initial care is provided at **the site of an injury**. All deployed personnel can provide first aid until a frontline medic can get to the injured person and begin stabilization and treatment. Emergency medical care prepares the injured for evacuation – usually by air – to the Role 3 hospital.
- A **Role 3 hospital** is a combat-support facility, usually part of a large base. At the Role 3 facility, injured members receive surgery and post operative care as needed. There are diagnostic and medical specialists on site to provide needed evaluation and care. Patients who need additional treatment, or who will require a lengthy period of time to recuperate, are stabilized and made ready for travel.
- CF personnel in Afghanistan with more serious injuries who require specialized treatment are evacuated to the **Landstuhl Regional Medical Center**, a U.S. Army facility in Germany which is also home to a small, highly professional Canadian medical contingent. There, additional surgery or care can be provided to further stabilize the patient for transfer home to Canada.
- Injured personnel **returning to Canada** from operations are supported by local Casualty Management Teams, who oversee treatment and rehabilitation. Most injured personnel have their major rehabilitation needs met in civilian facilities, with a Physiotherapy Officer assigned to newly returning personnel to assist in coordination of care and to augment the services provided by these facilities. Some personnel with less serious injuries may be able to receive follow-up rehabilitation at their base or wing physiotherapy clinic.

Choosing a site for rehabilitation

At home, injured personnel may receive care in many settings. It can be provided in hospital in-patient and out-patient departments, in the private practices of physicians and other health care professionals, and in various physical rehabilitation programs connected with the hospital, the nearby community, Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) or a member's own community.

In selecting a civilian facility to receive a CF patient, the following criteria are taken into consideration:

- which facilities can provide the best care to the injured
- in what region of the country the member wants to recover
- whether or not there is a CF installation nearby that can provide administrative support to the injured.

An important additional consideration is the proximity to the member's home unit or base, given the value of peer support and the mandate to return members to previous occupations whenever possible.

Continuing and long-term follow-up care for injured personnel is assessed on an individual basis and is designed to best meet the needs of the member to achieve maximum recovery and quality of life.

Support

There is a wide range of social support programs in place for the ill and injured:

- The CF's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Program collaborates with **peer support groups** for physically injured CF personnel. Peer support group coordinators meet with personnel returning injured from operations to address immediate concerns. They provide a point of contact for these personnel as they undergo rehabilitation, and provide guidance and inspiration based on their own past experiences. The group maintains an active list of CF personnel with rehabilitation needs, and advises leadership on priorities.
- The CF's **Member Assistance Program** provides external, anonymous, short-term counselling to Regular Force personnel and their families, and to some Reserve Force personnel, who are seeking assistance outside military health services. The program is civilian-based in that it uses professional counsellors provided by the Employee Assistance Services of Health Canada, but it is funded by the CF.
- Released CF members have access to the **VAC Assistance Service**, a confidential counselling service delivered through a nation-wide team of counsellors and accessed initially through a toll-free line.
- Former CF personnel and their families may also benefit from the **VAC Pastoral Outreach Program**, which can provide a swift response and high-quality care in various crisis situations. All former members of the CF, both Regular and Reserve Force, are eligible.
- The '**Soldier On**' program, launched in May 2007, is a joint initiative between the Canadian Paralympic Committee and DND to enhance, through sport, the quality of life of current and former CF members who became disabled while serving in the CF. The program teams up disabled CF personnel with paralympic athletes to assist the members with recovery and recuperation. The program is integrated into the larger morale and welfare programs within the CF's Personnel Support Programs Division.

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