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News: Program helps Marines with invisible wounds

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FORT CARSON, Colo. — “There is nothing wrong with having post traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury. You are not letting anyone down when you seek help for the symptoms that you are encountering and you are not alone in the fight.”



Courtesy Photo

Marine veteran Lance Cpl. Jeremiah Arbogast, a native of Cumberland, Md., listens to instructions by swim coach Shelia Taormina at swim practice for the 2012 Warrior Games at Colorado Springs, Colo., April 24, 2012. Arboast will compete in swimming and hand-cycling during the Games. The Warrior Games is a competition between wounded warriors from all military branches and includes swimming, track and field, cycling, shooting, archery, sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball. The third annual Warrior Games will run from May 1-5. (Photo by Lance Cpl. Chelsea Flowers)

Two members of the Wounded Warrior Regiments Medical Cell are the voices behind this powerful statement. Sharon Cross and Karola Thurman have made it a top priority to continue educating Marines and their leadership about the causes and effects of invisible wounds.

According to the Department of Defense, post traumatic stress disorder can be provoked by the threat of injury or death; even those in the general population who have not served in combat can develop this stress disorder. Traumatic brain injury is a traumatically-induced structural injury and/or physiological disruption of brain function as a result of an external force.

The Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment clinical service staff has taken numerous steps to ensure that every Marine who is experiencing symptoms associated with PTSD and TBI such as confusion, memory loss or irritability understands the resources and support available to them. One resource that they continue to promote is the Regiment’s Warrior Athlete Reconditioning program. Since 2009, the Regiment has incorporated this athletic program into every Marine’s recovery process in order to reduce the symptoms of their injury.

“We want to provide wounded, ill and injured Marines an opportunity to gain their strength and confidence through sharing experiences with their fellow Marines,” said Jennifer Sullivan the Wounded Warrior Regiment WAR program manager.

There is no cookie cutter cure for PTSD or TBI because not everyone has the same symptoms or responds the same way to treatments. However, Marine athletes who actively participate in sporting events such as the Wounded Warrior Regiment’s Warrior Athlete Reconditioning program, Marines Corps Trials and Warrior Games have shown tremendous progress throughout their recovery.

Marine veteran Lance Cpl. Jeremiah Arbogast who joined the Marine Corps in 1998 is one of the 300 wounded, ill and injured Marines who completed in the Marine Corps Trials, Feb. 13-22, aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton Calif. During this event he got into the pool for the first time since being diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder and spinal cord injury. He took home two gold medals during this event. The Trials allowed Arbogast and 49 other Marines and Marine veterans to earn their spot on the 2012 All-Marine Warrior Games team. They will compete against the Army, Navy

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and Coast Guard, Air Force, and Special Operations Command in Colorado Springs, Colo., April 30–May 5. During the Games, Arbogast will compete in the 50m freestyle, 100m freestyle, and 50m backstroke swimming events and the 10k handcycle.

Arbogast says that becoming active in sports and the Marine Corps community again has taught him that the darkness that he had once felt about his injuries was not permanent and that there are people out there who cared about him.

“Participating in events with Team Semper Fi and the Wounded Warrior Regiment has provided structure in my life. I feel like I am in a safety zone and I can let my guard down because the Marines and staff there understand.”

“These events allow Marines to stay connected and fill part of something even when they have lost so much,” said Cross, Wounded Warrior Regiment psychological health coordinator. “Marines with brain injuries can benefit from any kind of physical activities. Physical activity helps to ward off the symptoms of depression and self doubt.”

Arbogast can attest to the positive outcomes of participating in such events. “I know firsthand what PTSD does to someone emotionally and physically. Participating in the Marine Corps Trials has allowed me to become active again.” Arbogast continues to focus on the positive instead of the negative stating that, “my participation in sports has let me focus on my abilities and regain the confidence and camaraderie I once had while in the Marine Corps.”

Thurman and Cross continue to advocate for Marines to participate in the Marine Corps Trials and Warrior Games because, “the Marines who have PTSD and TBI need to be included to reconnect with their fellow Marines and it serves as a way for them to rejoin life,” said Thurman Wounded Warrior Regiment licensed clinical consultant.

Established in 2007, the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment was created to provide and facilitate non-medical care to combat and non-combat wounded, ill, and injured Marines, and sailors attached to or in direct support of Marine units and their family members in order to assist them as they return to duty or transition to civilian life. The Regimental Headquarters element, located in Quantico, Va., commands the operations of two Wounded Warrior Battalions located at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Camp Lejeune, N.C., and multiple detachments in locations around the globe.

For more information about the Wounded Warrior Regiment, PTSD/TBI support or the 2012 Warrior Games, go to: www.woundedwarriorregiment.org or call the Sgt. Merlin German Wounded Warrior Call Center 24/7 at (877) 487-6299.

Marines and Marine veterans who are interested in participating in Warrior Athlete Reconditioning program training camps or next year’s Warrior Games should contact the WAR program staff at WWSports@usmc.mil

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