

IOP Day Treatment clinic offers full-spectrum treatment to Soldiers

By Brandy Gill
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Like thunder and lightning, smoke and fire or new boots and blisters, behavioral health problems and substance abuse quite often go hand-in-hand.

Admitting you have a problem isn't easy, but if you find yourself in this situation, and want to make a change, help is available at the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's Intensive Outpatient Day Treatment (IOP) Clinic.

Many Soldiers struggling with substance abuse problems receive treatment from Fort Hood's Army Substance Abuse Program and don't have any further issues, but some Soldiers need something more, Dr. Cornelia Jones, clinical director of the IOP clinic said.

"ASAP offers outpatient treatment provided by credentialed substance abuse providers," she said. "Some Soldiers need more treatment than this in order to improve. This is where the IOP comes in. We go one step further. We have therapists who are credentialed for both substance abuse treatment and behavioral health treatment."

Sgt. Angela Widener, a 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment Soldier and recent graduate of the IOP program, was one Soldier who needed more.

"I had already quit drinking, and it didn't work so well. My anxiety got out of control and started affecting my work. I went to ASAP and the first thing they did was enroll me in the IOP (clinic)," she said.

Although she was nervous, Widener said she knew the IOP was different the moment she walked in the door.

"The staff's attitude was what I felt first when I walked in," she said. "They were just all so darn cheerful, and at first I didn't know what to make of it, but then I started to realize I wanted that kind of peace and happiness, too. I know I'm going to be safe every time I go (to the clinic)."

In the past, Soldiers who suffered from both behavioral health concerns and substance abuse received treatment from separate providers at different clinics.

According to Widener treating both issues at the same time is the only way to make a permanent change.

"They (IOP staff) aren't about 'work on not drinking, or work on addiction'. They are about what's causing the addiction, what's behind it. If you really want to be able to control that kind of behavior that's what you have to tackle," she said.

Some of the Soldiers who receive treatment at the IOP clinic are struggling because of incidents they experienced while deployed, and some are fighting addiction and behavioral health concerns because of other difficult life events.

Regardless of the reason for attendance, all Soldiers who participate receive the same high quality care, and they are all held to the same standards, Jones said.

“This is a difficult program to complete as we expect people to be serious about recovery. They attend our program for a full four weeks, receiving 120 hours of treatment during that period,” she said. “We receive permission from the commander for the Soldier to attend. Once the Soldier graduates from the IOP, he or she returns to duty and attends ASAP for aftercare.”

Widener said she believed one of the reasons her treatment was successful was because her chain of command both encouraged her participation and respected her privacy.

The IOP approach to care offers Soldiers a unique experience because the program allows them to receive intensive inpatient therapy without actually being admitted to a treatment facility.

“Soldiers continue to have treatment but return to their residence in the evening,” Jones said. “He or she also does PT with the unit prior to attending the IOP every day. This keeps the Soldier connected both at home and with the unit while attending treatment.”

Treatment at the IOP isn’t just about group or individual therapy sessions. The staff has incorporated several different techniques to help ensure success for Soldiers fighting addiction.

“Acudetox (acupuncture of the ear) assists by decreasing cravings, decreasing arousal, improving mood, and contributing to a general sense of well being,” Jones said. “We combine that with evidence-based treatments like Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprogramming (EMDR) and other empirically proven programs such as Making AA Easy (MAAEZ) to treat the whole Soldier. We add Tai Chi and Qi Gong to assist Soldiers in developing other means of relaxation.”

Widener said the Acudetox was as amazing treatment, and one she wants to continue to use.

“You go first thing in the morning, and it gave me time to relax and prepare for a good day. It allowed me to get on top of the anxiety before it even started,” she said.

Jones said that at this time the IOP only treats active duty Soldiers, but they are looking to include families in the recovery process at some point, too.

“Our way ahead includes a family component where spouses and older children come during the evening for family therapy,” she said. “The family plays a key role in a continued commitment to sobriety.”

A Soldier who is interested in the IOP must already be enrolled in ASAP. If you would like to be considered for IOP, you can ask for a referral and the IOP staff will schedule an interview. Consults from other hospital providers are also accepted.

The Fort Hood Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center Intensive Outpatient Day Treatment Clinic (IOP) staff helps Soldiers who are struggling with substance abuse and behavioral health concerns. (Photo by Brandy Gill, CRDAMC PAO).

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Dr. Cornelia Jones, the CRDAMC IOP clinical director, removes acupuncture needles from the ear of Spc. Eugene Ziambao, a CRDAMC IOP mental health specialist. The procedure is called Acudetox. The treatment is supposed to help Soldiers relax and it relieves cravings associated with addiction. (Photo by Brandy Gill, CRDAMC PAO).