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Dual mission, single focus

Military medicine strikes balance between readiness, healthcare

By Elaine Sanchez
Defense Health Network Central

Military medicine is a unique profession. Rather than one oath, military providers swear two – one to support and defend the Constitution and the other to “first, do no harm.”

To successfully navigate these dual priorities, the Military Health System is finding innovative ways to balance critical readiness requirements with the delivery of safe, high-quality care to ensure mission success both on and off the battlefield.

“In this increasingly complex and dynamic strategic environment, this balance is crucial, as a healthy and medically ready force is essential to our mission success,” said Air Force Maj. Gen. Thomas Harrell, director, Defense Health Network Central, and commander, Medical Readiness Command Alpha. “We also have a sacred commitment to deliver safe and effective care to all who serve and their families.”

Within DHN Central, a network of 39 military medical facilities, leaders are achieving this balance through collaboration and innovation, the general said.

Whole-of-team effort

As one of many examples, he noted, the 2nd Medical Group at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, recently launched a civilian-run clinic to sustain continuity of care during combat readiness training days.

One day each month, civilian providers deliver care to patients while military medical personnel focus on honing their skills for the battlefield. Prior to launch, the main clinic was closed on training days.

“By centralizing care into a dedicated clinic, staffed entirely by civilian employees, we’re able to provide continuity of care to our patients without disrupting military training requirements,” explained Air Force 1st Lt. Jonathan Tapia, 2nd Medical Group’s group practice manager. “This innovative approach allows us to maintain access to care, even during periods when our clinic would traditionally be closed.”

The centralized clinic, staffed by an all-civilian team of doctors, nurses, technicians and support personnel, offers acute, primary and

See **BALANCE**, Page 5

From humans to canines

NMRTC Twentynine Palms corpsmen cross-train with Army vets

By Christopher Jones
Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms

Naval Medical Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Twentynine Palms corpsmen have been participating in cross-training sessions with Army veterinarians at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), enhancing their

readiness to provide medical care to military working dogs (MWDs) in field and deployed settings.

The initiative, spearheaded by Army Capt. Andrea Lin, Officer in Charge of the MCAGCC Veterinary Section, and Navy Lt. Cmdr. Neal Petersen, provides corpsmen with hands-on experience in veterinary

care. Since September of 2024, corpsmen have been invited to attend bi-monthly training sessions to observe and practice key veterinary techniques, including intravenous (IV) catheter placement, endotracheal intubation, and anesthesia monitoring. These skills are critical for providing point-of-injury care and stabilizing MWDs when veterinary specialists are unavailable.

“This cross-training is invaluable for fostering collaboration and ensuring we’re prepared to care for MWDs,” said Lin, who joined the Army two years ago after working as a civilian veterinarian for over eight years. “It’s also a great opportunity for our team to develop leadership skills and confidence by teaching others.”

The Veterinary Section at MCAGCC is responsible for the medical care of the installation’s MWDs, including 24/7 emergency services and routine health maintenance. The team also ensures food safety for service members, families, and civilians by inspecting commissaries, mess halls, and other food facilities on base.

During recent training sessions, corpsmen observed and assisted with various procedures, including a spay (ovariohysterectomy) on a husky, a neuter (orchiectomy) on a shepherd mix, and suturing a laceration on a visiting MWD. These sessions also included detailed comparisons of medications and techniques used in human versus veterinary medicine.

See **CANINES**, Page 2



U.S. Navy photo by Christopher C. Jones, NHTP/NMRTC Twentynine Palms public affairs officer
Hospitalman Jessica Sanderson, from San Tan Valley, Ariz.; Hospitalman Hailey Alaguena, from San Jose, Calif.; and Hospitalman John Udanoh, from Detroit, Mich., practice veterinary techniques, including intravenous catheter placement, under the guidance of Army Capt. Andrea Lin, Officer in Charge of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Veterinary Section; Pfc. Amelia Knosp, an Animal Care Specialist from Fremont, Neb.; and Angela Adkerson, an experienced Animal Health Assistant from Brisbane, Australia, during a cross-training session at MCAGCC, Jan. 7.

INDEX

NMRTC Rota enhances readiness and retention through trainingPage 3
Cutting-edge medical readiness training at Camp BullisPage 5
Career opportunities..... Pages 5-6

• Canines (Continued from front page)

MWDs are indispensable members of the armed forces, serving in roles ranging from explosive detection to patrol. However, they face unique health challenges, including musculoskeletal injuries, paw pad lacerations, and heat-related conditions. Cross-training ensures that corpsmen can provide immediate, effective care in the absence of veterinary staff.

"There are not enough Veterinary Corps Officers (VCOs) or Army Veterinary Care Specialists (68T) to provide all MWD care in a deployment setting. We rely on the first line medics such as Army 68W and Navy Corpsmen to know and apply Canine TCCC (Tactical Combat Casualty Care) in the field," explained Lin. "Training like this bridges gaps and enhances inter-branch collaboration."

"Training with the corpsmen allows for better care in the field when there may not frequently be an Army vet staff member present, so that the working dogs can get the immediate first

aid that they need before they can be transferred to a better location for more extensive treatment," added Pfc. Amelia Knosp, an Animal Care Specialist from Fremont, Nebraska. "Personally, it has also allowed me to interact with more of my peers on base and given me opportunities to teach that I may not have gotten in other settings, especially as a lower enlisted member."

Corpsmen participating in the program have brought a wealth of enthusiasm and curiosity, impressing the Army veterinarians with their skills and confidence.

"The corpsmen are a lot of fun to work with," expressed Angela Adkerson, an experienced civilian Animal Health Assistant from Brisbane, Australia who moved to Twentynine Palms with her family in 2014. "While they may not know the ins and outs of veterinary medicine, many of them enjoy noting the differences between human medical care and animal medical care. They enjoy the new opportunities they get to try, like using our model dog as a learning tool for things such as IV

placement, intubation, and CPR."

The training has also allowed corpsmen to draw parallels between human and veterinary medicine.

"The vets were great with medical education. They allowed me to help them with procedures and observe their work. I saw how preoperative and postoperative care are similar," said Hospitalman Jessica Sanderson from San Tan Valley, Arizona. "My takeaway from this experience is you'll never know what kind of patient you'll have. Being ready with proper training will help with future triaging and understanding that there can always be something new to learn."

"The most challenging aspect of observing the surgeries was learning about the anatomical differences between canines and humans, especially while finding landmarks for intubation and with the actual spay or neuter," explained Hospitalman Hailey Alaguena, a corpsman from San Jose, California. "It was interesting as well to learn about how certain medications used in the clinic have reversal agents that would otherwise not work

if administered to humans."

"I observed how quickly and efficiently veterinary teams must work to minimize an animal's time under anesthesia," said Hospitalman John Udanoh, a corpsman from Detroit, Michigan. "Working closely with a veterinary team teaches you a lot about precision, quick decision making and the unique aspect of animal care. As a corpsman, this helps improve our adaptability and overall skills."

The cross-training program not only enhances medical readiness but also fosters camaraderie and mutual respect among service members from different branches.

"We're all on the same team," said Lin. "Collaborating in this way prepares us to better support each other in a deployed setting."

As the program continues, the participating corpsmen at NMRTC Twentynine Palms are gaining valuable skills that will enhance their ability to provide comprehensive care to animals when needed, helping ensure mission readiness across both branches of service.

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U.S. Navy photo by Christopher C. Jones, NHPT/NMRTC Twentynine Palms public affairs officer; *Hospitalman Jessica Sanderson, from San Tan Valley, Ariz.; Hospitalman Hailey Alaguena, from San Jose, Calif.; and Hospitalman John Udanoh, from Detroit, Mich., practice veterinary techniques, including intravenous catheter placement, under the guidance of Army Capt. Andrea Lin, Officer in Charge of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Veterinary Section; Pfc. Amelia Knosp, an Animal Care Specialist from Fremont, Neb.; and Angela Adkerson, an experienced Animal Health Assistant from Brisbane, Australia, during a cross-training session at MCAGCC, Jan. 7. The training ensures corpsmen are prepared to provide care to military working dogs (MWDs), critical members of the armed forces who perform roles such as explosive detection and patrol. Keeping MWDs mission-ready is essential to maintaining operational success and protecting service members in field and deployed settings.*

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Navy Medicine and Readiness Training Command Rota enhances readiness and retention through training programs

By **Cmdr. Jenny Paul**
U.S. Naval Hospital Rota

Navy Medicine and Readiness Training Command (NMRTC) Rota is dedicated to fostering professional development and recruitment in military medicine.

The small overseas command, collocated with Naval Hospital Rota, offers training and shadowing opportunities for service members, enhancing retention and operational readiness in line with Navy Medicine's strategic objectives. The training also supports those seeking career progression.

Because Naval Hospital Rota is a forward deployed shore command, many of its Sailors will be assigned to sea rotations or operational units after their tours. Preparing these Sailors to provide healthcare in a non-hospital setting, or as part of an expeditionary medicine (EEXMED) team, helps with skill sustainment, retention, and resiliency.

Capt. William Scouten, the hospital's director and the NMRTC Commanding Officer, stressed the importance of training. "Training builds individual competence and high-functioning teams ready for

rapid response. As we prepare for the most likely contingencies, teams validate lines of communication and reinforce command and control relationships that may become blurred during combat operations," he said.

One such training opportunity includes candidates from within the Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP), with non-medical backgrounds, who partner with the hospital's Emergency Department and Multiservice Wards to shadow nurses and receive mentorship.

Lt. Serena Yesenofski, Rota's MECP Coordinator said, "This program offers a unique opportunity for junior Sailors to earn a nursing degree and a commission. We are committed to supporting their full potential in service to others."

Additionally, officers in the Medical Service Corps (MSC) support the Medical Service Corps Interservice Procurement Program (MSC-IPP), which offers commissioning pathways and educational opportunities.

"MSCs take pride in mentoring candidates who may one day serve alongside us," said Cmdr. Aaron Eckard, Director for Administration. "This is how we invest and develop our future



Photo by Cmdr. Jenny Paul

Cmdr. Daniel Griffin, an Orthopedic Surgeon at Navy Medicine and Readiness Training Command (NMRTC) Rota, demonstrates orthopedic assessment skills to a Hospitalman Jaxon Drezek, during a readiness training exercise. Ongoing training in critical wartime and assessment skills are provided to staff across the facility to ensure personnel are ready for operational assignments and emergency situations. NMRTC Rota, collocated with the Naval Hospital, offers training and shadowing opportunities for service members who may be assigned to Expeditionary Medical (EXMED) Units, providing robust programs to support retention and operational readiness in line with Navy Medicine's strategic objectives.

officers."

NMRTC Rota has also hosted senior-year Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) Nurse Corps Midshipmen for immersive rotations, enhancing their readiness for future assignments.

"I am very excited that Rota has been able to offer this opportunity. NROTC is an incredible way of building leadership skills and truly helps prepare nurses for a successful career in the Navy," said Cmdr. Jenny Paul, Director for Public Health Services.

Within the past year, Preventive Medicine Technicians have trained 28 junior Sailors, preparing them for operational roles, while new initiatives like a Hearing Conservation Technician course aim to bolster mission readiness.

NMRTC Rota engages in an ongoing professional development series and has recently initiated Thursday afternoon training evolutions to ensure enlisted, officer and civilian staff are provided dedicated time for knowledge, skill and ability training and contingency operation preparations.

During this training time the com-

mands directorate and senior enlisted leaders leverage the expertise of the command and local clinical and administrative experts to provide lunch and learn and afternoon training sessions. These evolutions highlight changes in clinical practice guidelines, review capabilities, and provide staff hands-on clinical practice for new or war-time critical skills.

NMRTC Rota's strategic location in the Iberian Peninsula makes it a critical asset in supporting global medical missions throughout Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, ensuring readiness and expertise for any contingency.

Navy Medicine – represented by more than 44,000 highly-trained military and civilian health care professionals – provides enduring expeditionary medical support to the warfighter on, below, and above the sea, and ashore.



Photo by Cmdr. Jenny Paul

Hospitalman Giovanna Harrison, attached to Navy Medicine and Readiness Training Command (NMRTC) Rota performs an audiology examination on a Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Carmela Cabang during the commands Hearing Conservation Technician course.

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• Balance (Continued from front page)

some specialty care, as well as radiology, pharmacy and laboratory, to both walk-ins and scheduled patients. Since the centralized clinic stood up Aug. 14, 2024, providers have conducted more than 300 appointments, completed 350 lab tests, and filled over 1,600 prescriptions.

“It’s been very successful and truly gratifying to see the results,” said Air Force Lt. Col. Jennifer McAndrews, 2nd Medical Group’s chief nurse executive. “Within the first hour of opening the clinic, we received several patients in need of acute care, which validated the importance of this initiative. I take this very personally; we need to be here for our service members and all of our patients.”

Patient feedback has been positive, Tapia noted. “The availability of morning appointments during training days has provided a convenient option for beneficiaries, reducing wait times and enhancing their overall experience.”

The clinic also frees up military personnel to focus solely on training, rather than try to divide their time within in the clinic, and the group is taking full advantage of the opportunity, McAndrews said. The medical group recently partnered with a local simulation laboratory, where military nurses and technicians hone their skills using virtual reality and other innovative tools.

“As medics, we need to be using our skills to the top of our scope,” she said. “In a deployed environment, our medics will be called on to make decisions, and they need to be able to do so confidently and deliberately, and potentially without higher level support. We need to be here to take care of our service members, not just from a healthcare perspective, but from a readiness perspective.”

Civilian providers are reaping ben-



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Laiken King
Staff Sgt. Richard Robinson, 2nd Medical Group Aerospace Medical Technician, Tech. Sgt. Heather Phinney, 2nd MDG Flight Operational Medical Clinic non commissioned officer in charge, and Staff Sgt. Gabriel Flores, 2nd MDG aerospace medical technician, perform CPR on a simulated patient at the Willis-Knighton Innovation center Feb 14, 2023 in Bossier City, La. The aim of the simulated scenarios was to gain exposure to readiness requirements for Air Force Specialty Codes.

efits from this clinic as well, noted Patrick Hickey, 2nd Medical Group physician assistant. “This clinic gives civilian providers and nurses an opportunity to work beyond their usual scope of practice to evaluate and treat a broader age group, with an increase or change in complexity of disease, to the betterment of the individual provider or nurse and group,” he said.

Readiness in action

The 19th Medical Group at Little Rock Air Force Base is also working to ensure continuity of care while sustaining critical readiness training. As the only military treatment facility in Arkansas, the clinic receives patients from across the state and its neighboring states.

With a busy C-130 pilot training mission, the group is also charged with the care of trainees and support personnel. With the high operations tempo at Little Rock AFB, medical leadership identified the need for dedicated readiness training for their military medics. To minimize closure hours and in collaboration with installation leadership, the group launched a weekly, three-hour combat readiness training earlier this month.

“We have incredible medical personnel who are devoted to patient care,” said Air Force Col. Elizabeth Anne Hoettels, group commander and clinic director. “This initiative enables us to carve out dedicated time for training, but without compromising our ability to focus on patients.”

Thanks to leadership support across the board, she added, “We’re now able to offer realistic, hands-on combat training in the morning, while still ensuring continuity of care for our valued patients.”

During training hours, military personnel focus on medical and com-

bat readiness during training sessions and military exercises. This dual focus equips medics with critical lifesaving skills while also preparing them to support warfighters with tasks such as field communications and generator operations. A recent exercise focused on cold-weather operations and how to safely operate in these conditions.

“As leaders, it’s our responsibility to ensure our medics are competent and confident in what they’re doing,” Hoettels said. “I won’t always be there, but I can help ensure they can think through challenges and steps that need to be taken. Realistic training is critical to this effort. We must set our medics up for success in any setting, no matter how remote or austere.”

The clinics at Barksdale AFB and Little Rock AFB are just a few examples of how the Military Health System is working to enhance readiness and healthcare delivery in today’s dynamic strategic environment, Harrell noted.

“In this era of Great Power Competition, change is not an option, but a necessity,” he said. “We took an oath to support and defend our Constitution and nation; and, as medical professionals, to provide the highest standard of patient care. We have a dual mission, but a singular focus. These innovative solutions demonstrate our unwavering commitment to mission success, while always keeping our patients’ well-being at the forefront.”

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AETC leaders observe cutting-edge medical readiness training at Camp Bullis

By Senior Airman Matthew John Braman
59th Medical Wing

CAMP BULLIS, Texas – U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Sean Collins, Air Force Medical Command (AFMEDCOM) commander, and Brig. Gen. Eveline Yao, AFMEDCOM chief of staff, visited the 59th Medical Readiness Training Center (MRTC) at Joint Base San Antonio-Camp Bullis, Texas, to observe medical readiness training on 31 Jan. 2025. They were accompanied by senior leaders from the Air Education and Training Command (AETC), the Air Force Medical Readiness Agency (AFMRA), and the Defense Health Agency’s San Antonio Market (SGMED).

During the visit, attendees received briefings on tactical combat casualty care (TCCC), medical resource planning, and aeromedical evacuation procedures. They observed live simulations demonstrating life-saving techniques under combat conditions and participated in a walkthrough of the “Field of Dreams” site, where trainees navigated obstacles, patient retrieval exercises, and litter carries. The tour also included an intense simulation in Mission-Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear, testing medical teams’ ability to provide care while operating in a chemically contaminated environment.

The visit concluded with a demonstration at the MRTC flight line, where medical teams practiced patient loading and evacuation procedures. The 59th MRTC provides advanced combat medical training to Air Force medics, ensuring they are prepared to



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Matthew-John Braman

U.S. Air Force Airmen participated in a field training exercise on Jan. 31, 2025, at the 59th Medical Readiness Training Center, Joint Base San Antonio-Camp Bullis, Texas. The exercise included tactical combat casualty care (TCCC), patient retrieval drills, and litter carries, preparing medical personnel to provide life-saving care in austere environments. Senior leaders observed the training to assess medical readiness capabilities.

deliver life-saving care in deployed and austere environments. The visit reinforced AETC’s commitment to enhancing medical readiness across the Air Force.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Matthew-John Braman

U.S. Air Force medics conducted a high-intensity Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) exercise in a simulated chemically contaminated environment on Jan. 31, 2025, at the 59th Medical Readiness Training Center, Joint Base San Antonio-Camp Bullis, Texas. Wearing Mission-Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear, Airmen treated simulated casualties under battlefield conditions to enhance their combat medical skills.

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