

# Occupational therapists examine ways to improve Army readiness

NFDI

By Maria Christina Yager Blanchfield Army Community Hospital

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — April is Occupational Therapy Month and Blanchfield Army Community Hospital's Chief of Occupational Therapy explained what OT is and how it supports Army Readiness.

"Our mission is to optimize performance and readiness both in garrison and in operational environments to support the total force. Right now, Army OTs are currently working in human performance optimization with the Holistic Health and Fitness Program where Army OTs are embedded with battalions," said Maj. Robin Tennekoon, BACH chief of OT.

The Holistic Health and Fitness Program is a field test that has OTs, along with physical therapists, dietitians, strength and conditioning coaches and athletic trainers embedded in Armor, Engineer, Infantry, and Stryker combat battalions. The OTs address performance and readiness across a spectrum of performance factors.

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(U.S. Army photo by Maria Yager.) Blanchfield Army Community Hospital Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant Bill Canull administers passive stretching to Pfc. Paige Shriey's hand as part of her occupational therapy treatment. This technique may help improve her range of motion, muscle strength and activity level in her hand. COTAs generally work under an occupational therapist and implement treatments prescribed by the OT. April is Occupational Therapy Month and BACH recognizes the contributions OTs and OT Assistants make supporting Soldiers' medical readiness and caring for beneficiaries. U.S. Army photo by Maria Yager.



(U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Heather Redman)

Caregiver Michael Donato and his wife Senior Airman Faith Donato, caregiver and U.S. Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Betsy Jenkins and Master Sgt. Roger Hopkins, and caregiver Joey Kuwada and her husband retired Chief Master Sgt. Garrett Kuwada, have formed a new ohana after meeting at the Pacific Air Forces Wounded Warrior CARE event held in January at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. The family will head to the Wounded Warrior Games held this summer in Tampa, Florida.

# A Hickam 1st: 3 Airmen attending Wounded Warrior Games

By 2nd Lt. Amber Kelly-Herard 15th Wing Public Affairs

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM—Three Airmen attended the Pacific Air Forces Wounded Warrior CARE Event in January, not knowing it would lead to each of them attending the Wounded Warrior Games this summer—a first for Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

Beginning in June, retired Chief Master Sgt. Garrett Kuwada and Master Sgt. Roger Hopkins will compete at the games held in Tampa, Florida, as primaries, and Senior Airman Faith Donato will serve as an alternate.

Kuwada will also be the torch bearer for the games after exemplifying professionalism and sportsmanship during a CARE event in April.

#### Losing yourself

In September of 2016, Kuwada had a ruptured brain aneurysm resulting in blood around his brain and damage to his spinal cord and legs. He now suffers loss of coordination and balance, hearing, vision, speech and cognitive function.

"I was in a dark place," said Kuwada, who retired in 2018 after more than 27 years of service. "I was med boarded from the Air Force before I was ready and there was nothing I could do."

Donato, 647th Security Forces Squadron, also found herself in a dark place after she was struck by a tour bus while checking ID cards at the Ford Island entry control point.

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# • **Games** (Continued from front page)

Donato was rushed to Tripler Army Medical Center where she learned she had a severe case of fibromyalgia, spinal cord injuries, and loss of range of motion on the left side of her body.

"I was in a deep pit, everyone thought I was crazy because there was no way to prove I had nerve pain, so I started drinking alcohol," said Donato. "I tried to commit suicide for the first time in my life and when I had a mouth full of pills I knew I truly needed help."

Unlike Kuwada and Donato who were injured suddenly, Hopkins, U.S. Special Operations Pacific, did not know he was injured. After serving 17 years as a pararescueman, Hopkins was assigned a staff position with a slower work tempo than he was accustomed to and his injuries caught up to him.

Hopkins started piecing together an overall picture of his health and discovered he had problems with his hands, nerve impingements, cervical disk fusion, chronic back pain, multiple fractures, and overuse of his hips, knees, and feet. He

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also learned he suffered from a mild to moderate traumatic brain injury.

"After a surgery I was heavily sedated and I became dissociative, I started having flashbacks and became pretty combative, they wouldn't even let my wife see me," said Hopkins. "They re-sedated me and brought me back, but the writing was on the wall, I had post-traumatic stress disorder."

#### **Finding hope**

Although Kuwada, Donato, and Hopkins had different paths, they all found hope in the Wounded Warrior Program.

Through their medical journeys, each of the Airmen were referred to Cisco Johnson, Air Force Wounded Warrior Program Recovery Care Coordinator, who encouraged them to participate in a CARE event. CARE stands for Caregiver support, Adaptive Sports and Ambassador Workshop, Recovering Airman Mentorship Program and Resiliency Programming, and Empowerment in Transition.

"The CARE event was amazing, I just didn't know it existed," said Kuwada. "It's hard to move forward and recover, but I realized I was not alone, so I have to keep working and not give up hope."

In addition to recovery, the Airman are beneficiaries of an additional bonus.

"We are legit family, we hangout and talk often," said Donato. "We were in a deep pit and the Wounded Warrior Program literally saved our lives."

#### **Needing help**

In addition to their Wounded Warrior ohana, each of the warriors are also fortunate to have caregivers by their sides.

As part of the CARE events, caregivers are also given time to reflect on their role as caregivers and offered support.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Betsy Jenkins is a Navy reservist, who is also a yoga teacher, which is something she does with her husband Hopkins to assist with his recovery.

"It's nice to have a group of people you can relate to, who have similar issues as you're going through with work, family, and even just talking about the future, which is something I've not been able to do before," said Jenkins.

Michael Donato is a former Marine who changed his life to better support his wife, Faith.

"After I left the Marine Corps, I was in a really bad place mentally," Michael explained. "I was dealing with a lot of stuff and at the CARE event I learned other people are dealing with similar issues and I learned I have to keep going."

Joey Kuwada, who is Garrett's wife of 25 years, hopes more caregivers are made aware of available support programs.

"You can't take care of your spouse if you don't take care of yourself," said Joey.

Taking care of Airmen is more than a phrase, it's what the Air Force does for all Airmen, including providing professional families.



(U.S. Air Force photos by Tech. Sgt. Heather Redman)

Senior Airman Faith Donato, 647th Security Forces Squadron, poses with her bow and arrow. Donato will serve as an alternate at the 2019 Wounded Warrior Games held this summer in Tampa, Florida.



Retired Chief Master Sgt. Garrett Kuwada, originally from Honolulu, Hawaii, poses with his recumbent bike, which is one of the sports he will be participating in during the 2019 Wounded Warrior Games. Kuwada had a ruptured brain aneurysm resulting in blood around his brain and damage to his spinal cord and support for wounded Airmen and their legs. He now suffers loss of coordination and balance, hearing, vision, speech and cognitive function.

## www.militarymedical.com **USNS Mercy hosts Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day tours**

By Sarah Burford Military Sealift Command Pacific

The Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) played host to a group of unique visitors as they held tours for a group of dependent children of employees of the Southwest Regional Maintenance Center (SWRMC). The tour was part of SWRMC's annual National Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day, April 25, 2019.

The group of 15 children and their parents spent an hour touring the hospital ship, led by members of the Medical Treatment Facility (MTF). The hands on tour included patient care areas such as Casualty Reception, X-Ray Department, operating rooms, intensive care unit and the isolation unit, Blood Bank and laboratories. Many of the tour stops included interaction with the patient simulation mannequins, which gave the group the opportunity to learn about what takes place in a hospital, as well as a quick lesson in anatomy.

"This is by far the coolest thing I have ever seen," said one boy as he tried on a wound simulation prosthetic the ship's MTF crew use for simulation exercises.

According to their website, Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day is a national day that gives children a glimpse into the working world. The day revolves around parents taking their children to work to expose students to future job possibilities and the value of education. It is the successor to Take Our Daughters to Work Day, which was expanded to include boys in 2003.

"Having visitors onboard Mercy is always fun for us," said Hospital Corpsman



A dependent of a Southwest Regional Maintenance Center (SWRMC) employee displays on a wound simulation prosthetic as part of a National Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day tour on the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19).



(Photos By Sarah Burford)

Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Rudolph Delarea, a member of Mercy's Military Treatment Facility, demonstrates a patient simulation mannequin in one of the 12 operating rooms onboard the Military Sealift Command Hospital Ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) as part of the ships support of National Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day.

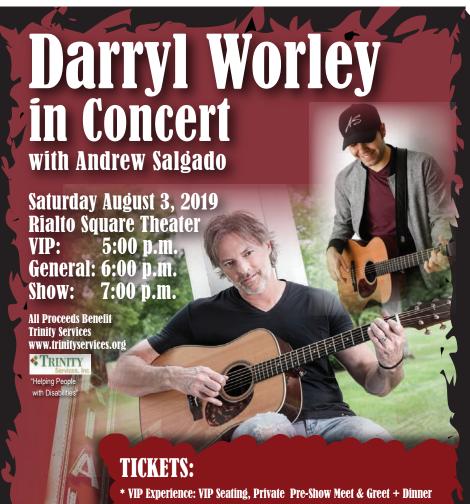
1st Class Rudolph Delarea, a member of Mercy's MTF. "We are proud to show off the capabilities of the ship. Having the kids here was really great, because maybe we inspired one or two of them to go into a career in medicine like we've chosen."

Mercy is currently on station in San Diego, Calif. in a reduced operating status, training and planning for its next mission.



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"It's breaking down the activity and analyzing each step of what it takes for you to accomplish something, whether it's being able to achieve expert with your rifle or being able to manage your finances or being able to effectively communicate with your platoon sergeant or your spouse with anger man-agement techniques," said Tennekoon. "We can use [performance optimization] in a lot of different functional ways and it's just to improve your performance in your everyday activities."

In the hospital, OTs and OT Assistants mainly work with patients with upper extremity injuries, but OTs across the garrison are also working at the Warrior Transition Battalion, Intrepid Spirit Center and in educational developmental intervention for children. The OT practice includes physical disabilities, behavioral health, inpatient/outpatient rehabilitation, work and community reintegration, ergonomics, and burn/amputee rehabilitation.

"Mainly its performance optimization, whatever limiting factors that [people] have in their daily life. A lot of times that does come with an upper extremity injury because that's what we use to do a lot of fine motor tasks



(U.S. Army photo by Maria Yager.)

Blanchfield Army Community Hospital Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant Bill Canull has patient Pfc. Paige Shriey warm her hand in a hot compress before he applies some passive stretching techniques as part of her occupational therapy treatment. COTAs generally work under an occupational therapist and implement treatments prescribed by the OT. OTs and OT Assistants on Fort Campbell support Soldiers, retirees and family members, providing clinical services within the hospital, Warrior Care, Mild TBI treatment, Educational Development Intervention and Behavioral Health services. t

in our lives, but it could be a mild traumatic brain injury, or life skills people need assistance with. So anything that's functionally limiting," said implement prevention and restoration

Tennekoon. OTs also deploy with Combat Operational Stress Control Units and

programs to help Soldiers cope with operational and personal stressors. They conduct unit surveys to help commanders get a pulse on the psychological factors and physiological factors that might be affecting the unit and provide therapeutic interventions to maintain Soldier readiness.

"In the Combat Operational Stress Control Detachments, we work on some prevention strategies so Soldiers can cope with an extraordinary situation, or if they are dealing with some family issues or interpersonal issues with their unit," said Tennekoon, explaining that the goal is maximizing functional independence.

The Army has both active duty and civilian OTs and active duty OT Specialists and civilian OT Assistants to help support the mission. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects employment of OTs to grow 26 percent through 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations.

"We just really want to promote the profession and let everyone know who we are and what we do in the Army and different areas you can find us," said Tennekoon. "If you feel there are areas in your life you want to optimize your performance, seek out an OT."

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Dr. Clayton Ramsue, MD, Retired Lt. Col. US Air Force Statewide Medical Director, Centurion of Mississippi

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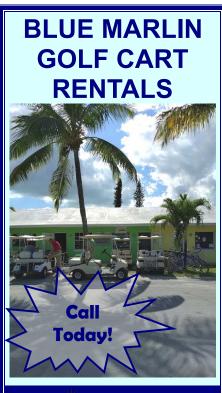
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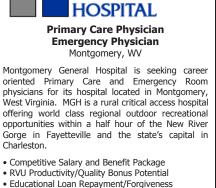
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# Beneath the microscope

**By Staff Sgt. Matthew Wisher** 39th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

A drop of blood or a specimen can tell a medical provider many things about a person from their oxygen levels to diagnosing diseases.

Here at Incirlik, the 39th Medical Support Squadron laboratory technicians take those samples and use them to assist medical providers with patient diagnoses and treatment plans.

"Every month we roughly analyze about 800 different types of samples," said Staff Sgt. Samuel Murphy, 39th MDSS.

As one of the steps in the diagnosis process, some people may associate the lab with only blood tests and urine samples but those functions are just the tip of the iceberg.

"We have a lot of moving parts going on behind scenes that most people aren't aware of from diagnosing patients with cancers to providing life sustaining blood supply," said Staff Sgt. Jake Henry, 39th MDSS laboratory technician. "The lab isn't as simple as most people think."

Lab technicians are skilled analyst whose expertise provide patients and healthcare providers diagnoses but also must be up to speed on other tasks within their job.

"We have to maintain a lot of our competencies," said Murphy. "Our career field is so broad that we are constantly learning and have to remain up to date on training and tasks so we can be certified no matter where we go."

One of those competencies they must maintain is possessing the ability to activate a walking blood bank. The walking blood bank is a lifesaving program designed for deployed locations to reduce the waste of blood by using Airmen as live storage instead of normal blood banking methods.

"Blood expires every 20 to 30 days," said Murphy. "We can't afford to waste that much blood so why not just use the Airmen as walking breathing storage."

Lab techs are just one of many tools in the 39th MDSS; even though it may not be the most known instrument, their impact is larger than life and ensures Airmen are ready to support the mission of Incirlik and its NATO allies at any time.

"Blood expires every 20 to 30 days," said Murphy. "We can't afford to waste that much blood so why not just use the Airmen as walking breathing storage."





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