

## Give an Hour Foundation

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Group Offers Free Psychiatric Care to War Vets

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WASHINGTON -- A coalition of mental health groups announced plans Monday to establish a nationwide network of psychiatrists, psychologists and other experts to provide free counseling to combat veterans and their families.

"Citizen soldiers have had extended, long deployments, and that has created a difficult situation for them and for their families," said Dr. Richard Harding, president of the American Psychiatric Foundation. "Those people need help ... and we have a duty to take care of them."

The groups' goal is to enlist about 40,000 mental health professionals -- about 10 percent of the nationwide force -- to donate time and services to individual veterans, their families, or veterans groups.

Their web site is: <http://www.giveanhour.org/skins/gah/home.aspx>

Learn more at Military.com's PTSD Center

The resources would be in addition to services already provided by the Defense Department and Veterans Affairs agencies, especially in areas with long wait times or long travel distances for servicemembers to easily take advantage of those official medical treatment options.

Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, president of the Give an Hour Foundation, said more than 1.6 million servicemembers have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan over the last seven years, and studies show at least 20 percent have battled with anxiety, depression and serious stress disorders since their return.

Those figures don't include family members, who can also suffer mental health issues when their loved ones are sent to war.

"But there is reason for hope and optimism," she said. "We know so much more today about mental health in general and about conditions like PTSD. We know that post-traumatic stress disorder doesn't need to turn into a chronic illness."

Her group currently has about 1,200 licensed professionals donating an hour a week to counsel servicemembers and their families.

The Eli Lilly foundation donated \$1 million to the effort at the event. Project officials said the funds will be used for public awareness and servicemember outreach programs, as well as recruiting more counselors throughout the country.

To find a counselor in your area, or to volunteer services to the mental health counseling project, visit <http://www.giveanhour.org/>.

Sound Off...What do you think? Join the discussion.

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