



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Hospital paves the way in pain management

By: Stacy Neumann, Medical Department Activity Public Affairs

Specialist Gail Bland is in constant pain. Still, she gamely planted her grey and pink sneakers on a mat, folded over and placed her hands on the floor as the yoga video instructed.

"I will try anything. I want to be educated," said the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Soldier. "It's important to know my limitations and have the knowledge to manage my pain correctly."

That attitude, combined with a referral from her medical provider, landed Bland in the Functional Restoration Program at Evans Army Community Hospital. Fort Carson has the first MEDDAC in the Army to implement the program. Dr. Alan Brewer, chief of the Mountain Post Pain Clinic, said it represents a new multidisciplinary approach to helping Soldiers deal with chronic pain.

Brewer explained, "Rather than sending Soldiers out to see if different therapies work, we have an entire team of specialists come in. We can sit down with everybody and see if we achieve the progression we want to get. This is about improving their activity level and quality of life."

Soldiers in the intensive outpatient program work with occupational therapy, physical therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic, behavioral health, clinical pharmacy, nutrition and a nurse educator. For two days a week over the span of four weeks, those diagnosed with chronic pain try everything from tai chi to water exercises and wall climbing.

"A lot of them have a huge amount of anxiety. They're afraid they'll get worse," said Brewer. "Here, they can do activities and not hurt themselves. We can do it in a controlled environment."

Behavioral management is a big part of the program, added Brewer, because Soldiers need to develop realistic guidelines. Chronic pain can easily lead to depression and behavioral health specialists can help Soldiers reframe the issue.

One of the questions Soldiers answer is, "Do you consider your pain a disability?"



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Specialist Michael Salas, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, said he had never thought about it that way. "I'm not into setting limits. I jumped at the opportunity to learn as opposed to medication. I want to know if anything I learn can substantially manage my pain."

Though only in its third iteration, Brewer noted that the Functional Restoration Program has already seen good results. Some Soldiers reported a 70 to 80 percent pain level reduction. More importantly, he emphasized, is the cultural change. Those who don't see a change in pain level said they feel more emotionally stable and have an improved ability to handle their chronic pain.

"It helps Soldiers develop the mental capacity and fortitude to be self sufficient and proud of what they do," said Brewer.

Administrators conduct an after action review after each four week course. They are constantly modifying and changing it to better suit the Soldiers' needs. A new class begins each month with approximately eight to 10 active-duty participants who have been referred by providers. Ultimately, Brewer knows most want the same thing as Bland.

"People look at me and tell me I look fine," she shrugged. "I'm hoping, at the end of this program, I can gain a sense of normalcy."

