

July 14, 2016

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## **Team effort helps alleviate joint pain, earns Army Medicine Award**

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

For more than 74 years the Army and Air Force have called Colorado Springs home. Through the years the two services have partnered together on many projects.

Last year medical staff from Fort Carson and the U. S. Air Force Academy began a joint effort to help patients alleviate their joint pain.

"We started the Total Joint Replacement Program last August," said Air Force Maj. William Howarth, an orthopedic surgeon assigned to the Air Force Academy's 10th Medical Group. "The program allows military beneficiaries to get hip, knee and shoulder replacements done at a military facility."

In the first year of the program Howarth and his team completed 120 joint replacements. Since the Academy only has a medical clinic these surgeries have been completed at Fort Carson's Evans Army Community Hospital by Air Force and Army staff.

"The great thing about this team is no matter where they work, no matter what they do, they all work together as a team and you can't tell who they are once they get into scrubs," said Air Force Lt. Col. Walter Matthews, 10th Medical Group commander. "It is a fantastic team, a great example of joint operations."

This joint partnership for joint replacements was recognized by U.S. Army Medicine with the July 7 presentation of its 3rd Quarter Wolf Pack award.

"The Wolf Pack award was established by Army medicine and sponsored by the AMEDD Civilian Corps to recognize teams of military and civilians working together to accomplish good things for the mission of our organizations," said Gregg Stevens, the chief of Army Medicine's Civilian Corps. "It is a real honor to present this award to everyone on the team."

"This award epitomizes teamwork on behalf of patients," said Army Col. Patrick Garman, the U.S. Army Medical Department Activity – Fort Carson and Evans hospital commander. "This is such a great thing and means so

much for our patients and the multi-service market that we take care of here in Colorado Springs.”

The team included not only the doctors and operating room staff, but also staff from Evans’ intensive care unit, family recovery ward, physical therapy, occupational therapy, laboratory and pharmacy.

“Any surgical procedure that requires an overnight stay requires a team approach and the Evans team has been there every step,” said Howarth. “The best team to take care of military people is military people because we understand what they have gone through, and what they will go through.”

And that understanding is very helpful for the patients who opt to have a hip, knee or shoulder replaced. For Peggy Walk, the wife of a retired Soldier, Howarth’s knowledge made the replacement of both her knees last year a little easier.

“Howarth kept telling me this is what you can expect,” Walk said. “He told me, that the first couple months you are going to hate me. Then you are going to start liking me because your life is going to be so much better.”

Walk said that she had struggled with pain for about 15 years. She had tried injections and physical therapy but nothing alleviated the pain. So she struggled with the pain and coped the best that she could.

“My passion is fishing and before the surgeries it was a struggle just to walk to the shore of a lake,” Walk said. “Now I can walk 2 ½ miles and it doesn’t bother me at all. I can enjoy the things I like to do. My quality of life is so much better.”

But she admits getting to where she is now, nine months after the second surgery, was not a “cake walk”. She said her first day of physical therapy was tough and she had thought about quitting. But by the end of the first week something clicked and she realized she had been given an opportunity for a painless life and she was going to take advantage of it.

“It took a lot of commitment and I had a great cheerleader, my husband, he was fantastic and pushed me,” Walk said. “The biggest thing people need to understand before they go into this surgery is that it is going to be a lot of work and they need to ask themselves how bad do they want this.”

TRICARE beneficiaries who are tired of struggling with joint pain should call 333-5086 and make an appointment with one of Howarth’s team members.

They do not need a referral from their regular doctor to benefit from the Total Joint Replacement Program.



Air Force Maj. William Howarth (center) accepts the U.S. Army Medicine's 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Wolf Pack award from Gregg Stevens on behalf of the Total Joint Replacement Program team. (Photo by Jeff Troth)