

August 22, 2016

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## University helps front line MSAs to help patients

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

"When I started as a Medical Support Assistant 20 years ago I always thought that I was out of the loop," said Gail Weyand, a Supervisor MSA in Evans Army Community Hospital's Clinical Support Division. "We didn't get all of the messages that were sent out and didn't always know what was going on in our own clinic."

Today, Medical Support Assistants, those who work the clinics' front desk, are expected to do more than just greet patients and let the doctor know that the patient is there.

"MSAs are the first individual a patient sees, and that interaction with the patient more than likely is going to drive how the rest of that appointment goes for the patient," said Master Sgt. Isagani Maawac, noncommissioned officer in charge to Evans' Deputy Commander of Medical Services. "A patient's time with the MSA can determine the overall experience, regardless of whether or not the doctor provided the best care or the RN provided the best triage."

To help ensure that patients get the best service they can when they walk up to a clinic's front desk Evans began EACH MSA University a few years back. It consisted of a day of classes and hands-on training. When Maawac arrived at the hospital two years ago, he and others saw a need for additional classes and expanded it to two days.

EACH MSA University is held every other month and is a yearly requirement for all Evans' MSAs. During the two days of classes the MSAs are instructed on a variety of subjects such as TRICARE Online, managing clinic appointments, scheduling appointments and customer service.

"To ensure that we provide a positive atmosphere, a positive experience for our patients we had to ensure that the MSAs understood how important their role in the clinic is," said Maawac. "So we created classes that would benefit the MSAs and in turn the clinic and our patients."

Maawac said that the MSAs are the first and last person in the appointment process and they have to be able to create follow up appointments for patients as well as articulate to them how to book appointments using TRICARE Online.

“It is really important for the MSA to know how to do these things,” said Weyand, who became an administrator for the university when she began her current job last October. “They are the front line for a clinic, the first person to greet a patient and the one who will answer the patient’s questions. Our MSAs should be able to say ‘this is where you can go to do this’ or ‘this is what you need to do’ versus ‘I don’t know’.”

To help increase their knowledge base and “keep the MSAs on their toes” Weyand plans on adding more classes to the future iterations of EACH MSA University. Based on discussions in this month’s classes she wants to add instruction on the Exceptional Family Member Program and Secure Messaging. The university is designed so that they can substitute classes to meet the MSAs’ current needs.

One class that Maawac says will always be taught is customer service; this reinforces dignity and respect.

“Sometimes everyone, even MSAs, can get caught up in the day-to-day hustle and bustle,” said Maawac. “These classes provide tools our MSAs can use to maintain their dignity and respect no matter how overwhelmed or busy they get. We use the MSA University to remind them that no matter what is going on at the end of the day it is not our emergency, it is our patient’s emergency and we are here to serve and treat them.”



During an EACH MSA University class, Gail Weyand talks to other Medical Support Assistants about managing appointments. (By Jeff Troth)