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# **AMIOP – Program provides more extensive services**

## **Gives Soldiers a stepping stone**

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

Fort Carson Soldiers now have an additional option for beating substance abuse. The Addiction Medicine Intensive Outpatient Program offers Soldiers an alternative to once a week or 24/7-inpatient services.

“Prior to the start of AMIOP on Fort Carson the substance abuse program was doing what we consider traditional outpatient treatment,” said Eva Martinez-Klich, the chief of Evans Army Community Hospital’s AMIOP. “Soldiers were seen one or two times per week for their drug or alcohol addiction. If they required more intensive services we would send them to a civilian organization off post. Now we have a third option available for them.”

AMIOP began on the Mountain Post February 6 and is currently only available for active duty military. Instead of the one or two hours a week that used to be available, Soldiers now meet individually and in group sessions three hours a day, three days a week.

The sessions are two fold – education and therapy. The Soldiers learn how addictions progress and what their brain looks like when they use drugs or alcohol. The therapy sessions are geared to changing the patient’s thinking and behavior.

For one Soldier in the program drinking became “really bad” and he was command referred to the Substance Use Disorder Clinical Care where he chose AMIOP to help kick his alcohol use disorder.

“The program is great and I got the help I needed to quit cold turkey and I am getting the support I need to stay sober,” the Soldier said. “I have built bonds with the others in my group therapy sessions. Since we all have the

same problems we know what each other is going through and are here to help each other if we come upon a rough time.”

The program is set up so that Soldiers can begin treatment at any time. This means that some people may be on their first week of recovery, while others could be on their fifth or sixth week. Martinez-Klich said that it is set up this way so that individuals who are just beginning recovery can learn from those who have “more time under their belts”.

One of the goals of AMIOP is to improve the Soldiers’ life skills and promote their resilience by helping them to identify the stress triggers that caused their substance abuse.

“We are teaching them to identify when they are stressed out, what caused it and alternative coping skills besides alcohol and drugs,” said Martinez-Klich. “We want to change the way they think, to help them identify their triggers.”

The program’s chief said that for some the stress trigger could be arguing with their spouses and their normal reactions would be to drink or do drugs. During the AMIOP sessions, Soldiers learn coping skills that help them communicate with others without arguing and they learn how to avoid the stress triggers that led to their addiction.

The Soldiers also learn that in order to kick their habit, they may have to change who they hang out with. Martinez-Klich said that it is difficult to quit drinking if your friends always have a drink in their hand.

The program also incorporates alternate therapy such as yoga and nutrition counseling to show participants other ways to change their behavior.

“Because of my drinking I lost interest in hobbies I used to enjoy,” said the participant Soldier. “Since starting AMIOP I have taken back up some of them. Right now I am in the middle of building a diesel truck and it is keeping my mind pretty occupied.”

The program is not only designed for those trying to overcome substance abuse, but also as the next step after completing inpatient treatment.

“In a traditional 28-day inpatient treatment program for drugs and alcohol the patient is removed from all their stressors during treatment,” said Martinez-Klich. “Life has many stressors that the patient does not have when they are in an inpatient program. AMIOP helps them transition from full-time hospital treatment by gradually decreasing their treatment while at the same

time giving them the opportunity to work on their stressors, learn coping skills and develop support structures while they are in their own environment.”

The program also provides benefit to the Army as it allows Soldiers enrolled in treatment to participate in unit activities and return to duty each day.

In the future, Evans hospital’s Addiction Medicine Intensive Outpatient Program will offer even more intensive services, 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, for those that need it. And she hopes to one day offer this program to dependents and retirees.

“AMIOP allows us to provide the appropriate level of care for our Soldiers, by giving them more contact with their provider,” said Martinez-Klich. “It is definitely a good addition to the services that are already here on Fort Carson.”

For those needing assistance with a substance use disorder, call the Behavioral Health Addiction Medicine Clinic at 526-2862.



AMIOP counselors, David Stewart and Laura Wesselhoff, lead a session on kicking alcohol or drug substance abuse. (Photo by Jeff Troth)