



TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER

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Tripler's Concussion Clinic opens alongside Sleep Lab

By Sgt. Matthew Coleman

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TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER-During the Grand Opening on Oct. 18, Tripler Army Medical Center's Concussion Clinic joins the Sleep Lab as one of Tripler's newest additions to its facility.

"With our primary purpose being to treat those service men and women who have suffered traumatic brain injuries (TBI), we are about making Soldiers as functional in society as possible," says Dr. Gregory Johnson, one of two Family Medicine Physicians working in the new Concussion Clinic at TAMC. "Most people do quite well, and return to duty."

The big move behind the TBI program, begun in 2007, proved successful in allowing patients to be seen more quickly, focusing on a common (but possibly devastating) injury in theatre.

"Patients were previously required to visit numerous clinics around the hospital in order to receive care," Johnson said. "With the establishment of the Concussion Clinic, however, patients will now receive care in one location, providing improved access. We're definitely getting the problem addressed."

The clinic is seeing all comers, whether by physician, command or family referral; to include walk-ins.

Specifically, the clinic's staff focus on treating the symptoms associated with TBI, such as memory loss, sleep problems and anger management.

"When your brain gets injured, we try to bridge over the parts that don't work, or retrain them," said Johnson.

The clinic doesn't just address those on the Island of Oahu, but those stationed throughout the Pacific Region. Mr George Husky, the TBI liaison officer, spoke about the TeleHealth program.

"We've been working with [American Samoa] for quite some time. Before, soldiers had no follow-on care from the Active Duty side. They were only being seen by the VA clinic, which has limited provider availability." Husky said.

Before, a soldier would have to be put on a plane and fly to Hawaii for treatment. Now, it's as simple as a drive to the TBI TeleHealth center, currently located at the American Samoa VA Center.

Johnson discussed the ease of the system.

“Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, I have them scheduled. I can just turn [towards the monitor] and they're right there. I've worked rurally before,” he stated, before comparing a 45-minute drive to a five and a half hour flight.

“When I was in Korea, Okinawa and Camp Zama, they were really excited about it. Camp Zama doesn't have a lot of providers, and Okinawa and Korea are feeling pretty far away out there. We're starting to link up better,” Johnson said.

These doctors and support staff help piece soldiers' lives back together. “They think, ‘I'm no longer the guy that can just run 50 miles', you're not young, immortal... it shakes that belief. We have to help them find their way back. I think that's the rewarding part of my job, because most people end up making great progress,” continued Johnson.



Flanked by Sleep Lab and Concussion Center personnel, Commanding General, Tripler Army Medical Center, Brig. Gen. Keith Gallagher speaks of the VA-Tripler joint efforts to make these initiatives a reality Oct. 18 at the grand opening of both.