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*Helping the war effort*

# **Soldiers, Marines returning from war to Tripler are taken care of by Patient Family Assistance Team**

**by Margaret Tippy**

## **Tripler Army Medical Center Public Affairs Office**

HONOLULU—Sgt. Wilson Coronel, 24, assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was deployed in Afghanistan Oct. 20<sup>th</sup> when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blew up hitting the cargo HUMVEE he was riding shotgun in.

Eight Soldiers were in the vehicle - only the driver and Coronel were hit – Coronel was hit the worse.

Both major bones of the left leg were broken, and shrapnel embedded all up and down both legs. Coronel was flown to a Combat Support Hospital (CSH) and treated in theater, stabilized and flown to Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Germany.

After being treated there, he was flown to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Wash, D.C.; stopped at Scott Air Force Base, Ill.; Travis Air Force Base, Calif.; and finally flew into Hickam Air Force Base.

“I thought it went pretty fast,” Coronel said. “I was injured on Oct. 20<sup>th</sup> and made it to Tripler Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>.”

“They really took care of me. If I was in pain or uncomfortable, they gave me something to help,” he said. “Then when the bird (airplane) landed, Sgt. (Kelli) Miyasato (the 25<sup>th</sup> ID liaison at Tripler) was right there. She came up on the plane and told me she would be my liaison and would visit everyday.

“And she does come up to see me in the hospital everyday,” Coronel said. “Any questions I have or needs I have, I just need to ask her and she does everything she can.”

Miyasato introduced him to his Nurse Case Manager Rochelle Soto and the Rear Detachment Unit he’s assigned to.

His sister, Melissa Davis, 20, of Jackson, Miss., is the family he wants to get back to, and he said doctors hope to have him home soon.

“I’m real happy with the care here,” Coronel said. “I need one more skin graft on my left leg, and then I can go home and crash on (his sister’s) couch. I’m looking forward to it.”

Miyasato is a part of Tripler Army Medical Center's Patient and Family Assistance Team (PFAT) that is tracking wounded and injured Soldiers' every movement to make sure these Heroes of the Global War On Terrorism (GWOT) are well taken care of.

When they fly into Hickam, Soldiers like Miyasato are there to take care of them.

"It's really awesome being able to go on the bird and welcome them home," she said smiling. "Not very many people get to feel the pride you feel when you've got the Soldiers home to Tripler and they're going to get the care they need."

She gets them to Tripler by van or ambulance, and medical care begins.

"(When the returning Soldiers) talk about their deployments, all they want is to go back and be with their comrades," Miyasato said.

"I have a real sense of pride. This is the best job I've ever had in the military," said the six-year veteran.

Soldiers like Miyasato and unit representatives are greeting the returnees at Hickam; transporting them to Tripler for their checkup; paging physicians to provide that checkup; releasing those Soldiers who are outpatients as soon as possible to spend time with loved ones; and inprocessing those who are inpatients to the Warfighter Ward. And all this normally happens in the middle of the night.

In Germany, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Liaison Team starting with Capt. Danielle Carosello at Landstuhl tracks every patient movement.

The Air Evacuation Office has done a stupendous job of taking care of these Soldiers, said Lt. Col. Douglas B. Sloan, Tripler's chief of Patient Administration Division and the GWOT Patient Tracking and Accountability Team.

The team has expanded as the number of returning Soldiers – and now Marines - has grown to close to 290 in the last 11 months. Now, military liaison representatives from the other services attend meetings also.

Nurse case managers led by Marsha Graham and represented by nurses like Karen Williams and others, make sure Soldiers can reach them 24/7 with pager numbers; monitor their healthcare; and take care of their needs.

"We want to thank the Air Force Nurses and Flight Surgeons who take care of our patients on the long trip home to Tripler," said Glenna Lukomski, a nurse case manager.

Eileen Maher of Social Work Case Management, makes sure other needs are taken care of, and counseling is provided; Community Health Nursing led by Maj. Mary Christal assesses Soldiers' needs; and the Veterans Administration staff work with the Tripler staff in case VA needs to provide care. Marisa Burgess-Suntheimer, Tripler Patient Affairs, and Medical Hold 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. James Jansen all work to take care of the Soldiers' needs.

Sloan likes to call the team approach the "concierge" high touch approach for all medical and social needs.

And all of this is monitored by Col. (Dr.) David Crudo, chief of Deployment Health, who has oversight responsibility for the returning wounded and injured.

The team meets every weekday at 9 a.m. to take care of patient needs.

"I estimate 75 percent of those returning have been outpatients and 25 percent inpatients," Crudo said. "And about 80 percent have been in the category 'Disease None Battle Injury' (DNBI).

"We've seen mostly orthopedic injuries – a lot of leg injuries, a lot of broken bones and Soldiers taking shrapnel," he said.

Everyone is working together to care for these Heroes, and make sure their welcome home is everything it needs to be from a grateful nation. The nurse case managers even made sure every returned patient had plans for Thanksgiving dinner and weren't alone on the holiday.

Coronel unfortunately didn't make it home for Thanksgiving because of medical procedures that still needed to be performed but he's receiving world-class healthcare at Tripler because of all the people who are part of Tripler's Patient Family Assistance Team.