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Tripler officer named Social Worker of the Year

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Maj. Veronica Almeida, licensed clinical social worker, Department of Social Work, Tripler Army Medical Center, was recently named Social Worker of the Year, recognizing her outstanding performance and dedication to Army Medicine. The 2012 SWOY recognition was shared with Capt. Janet Payne from Europe Regional Medical Command.

HONOLULU -- Maj. Veronica Almeida, who works in the Department of Social Work, Tripler Army Medical Center, here, was recently named one of the Army's Social Workers of the Year for 2012.

Almeida has 16 years of active duty service and has been a licensed clinical social worker for 17 months.

"My desire to become a social worker stemmed from my life experiences prior to becoming a Soldier," Almeida said. "I developed an immense desire to assist those in need. The Army provided the education and an opportunity to pursue my long term goal of becoming a Soldier, an officer and (now) a social worker."

Almeida was recommended for the annual award due to her exemplary work with redeployment behavioral health screening and her assistance in dealing with the aftermath of a crisis in Afghanistan.

"(The award is meant to recognize) a social worker who embraces the core values of the Army, (displays) clinical competence, and is an adaptable and flexible leader in the social work profession," said U.S. Public Health Service Lt. Cmdr. Cole Weeks, Clinical Operations officer in charge, Department of Social Work, TAMC.

Almeida developed a behavioral health screening packet for down range redeployment teams that led to the coordination of timely behavioral health care and continuity of care for nearly 270 at-risk Soldiers.

Then, while deployed to Afghanistan, Almeida immediately responded to a mass casualty resulting from a two-ton vehicle borne improvised explosive device. She provided timely medical and behavioral health care by treating and evacuating 40 military and civilian casualties, and treating an additional 50 casualties with traumatic brain injuries.

"Having the opportunity to serve our warriors in Afghanistan was by far the most challenging (part of being a social worker), but also the most rewarding and fulfilling," Almeida said.

Almeida's dedication to social work and helping those in need is apparent on the home front as well.

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"(Maj. Almeida) represents the warrior behavioral health medic spirit on and off the battlefield," said Col. Derrick Arincorayan, chief, Department of Social Work, TAMC. "Her outstanding administrative skills have greatly impacted the Department of Social Work's mission in the areas of logistics, training and operational capabilities. Her efforts have led to increased access to care, significant cost savings and outstanding quality of care (for our beneficiaries)."

Arincorayan, who is also the social work consultant to the Army Surgeon General, was charged with reviewing the Social Work Council of Colonels' nominations for the annual award, and selecting the awardees. The 2012 award was shared by another Army Medicine social worker. Also named was Capt. Janet Payne from Europe Regional Medical Command.

Almeida credits the people she works with everyday who help guide her for making her the social worker she is.

"I am truly honored to be selected to receive the Social Worker of the Year award for 2012," Almeida said. "It is a direct reflection and a testament to the type of mentorship I have received in my short tenure as a social worker at (Tripler)."

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