Keeping it all together

For wounded, ill, and injured service members and their families

Military OneSource
24/7 family support
800-342-9647

Keeping It All Together

You have arrived at the military treatment facility where your loved one is receiving care. No matter what the circumstances are that brought you here, questions and concerns are probably rushing through your mind.

This notebook can make things easier. It is a place to document and organize your service member's journey through treatment and recovery. It has these sections:

- *Medical Journal.* This is a place to record information about admissions and discharges, caregivers, medical procedures, and medications. It has places to write down questions you want to ask, and for keeping notes about plans and care.
- *Support/Resources.* This information will help you understand the recovery process and what different medical providers do, and learn about the many resources available to your service member.
- *Travel/Lodging.* This section provides information about Invitational Travel Orders and places to stay during your service member's recovery.

At the end of the notebook there are plastic sleeves designed to hold the many business cards you are likely to receive.

This notebook contains confidential medical information.
Please return it to:

Service member's name _____

Family member's/caregiver's name _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Mailing address _____

Hospital room number _____

First Questions and Answers

What should I do first?

Focus on your basic needs first—food, lodging, money, child care. Do whatever is needed for your service member's comfort and well-being. Let your family members and friends know that you have arrived safely. Then begin to find your way around the hospital and learn where you can go with questions. Take care of these basics, then come back to this notebook and learn more about the recovery process ahead.

When can I see my service member?

Every medical situation is different. Maybe you and your service member have already been together, or maybe you have been told that you need to wait until a surgery or treatment is finished. The doctors, nurses, and other care providers taking care of your loved one will let you know when the time is right—which will be as soon as it's medically possible.

In the meantime, remember that *you are needed here*. You were invited because doctors determined that your presence is important to your service member's recovery. You are a very important part of this process.

Where should I stay?

The person who gave you this book or someone else from the hospital can explain lodging options to you. In some cases you may be able to sleep temporarily in the room with your service member. Or the military treatment facility (MTF) where your service member is receiving care may have separate lodging for families.

Fisher Houses, available at many MTFs in the United States, can also be an excellent option. Fisher Houses are large homes with private suites, built and sponsored by a nonprofit organization that supports families of wounded, ill, and injured service members. Depending on the space available, families may stay in Fisher Houses (at little cost) during their loved one's hospitalization. Someone in the social work department at your service member's MTF can tell you more and make reservations for you.

If these options aren't available or if you choose to stay at a nearby hotel, you can receive reimbursement for some of these expenses.

In many MTFs or hospitals there are groups of people called "Patient Affairs Teams." For Marines and their families there are Marine Corps Liaisons at Navy facilities to provide nonmedical care services. At Army facilities there are "Soldier Family Assistance Centers" (SFACs) with people who provide support and information.

When you have some time, you can also look at *www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov*, an online partnership for wounded, ill, and injured service members, veterans, and their families.

What is a Recovery Team?

A "Recovery Team" is the team of professionals that support a recovering service member and the service member's family. It is important to build strong relationships with them and take advantage of their help. In addition to the people listed below, it includes doctors, therapists, and other medical and non-medical professionals who provide care, support, and benefits to your loved one. Depending on your service member's condition and needs, some or all of these people may be part of your service member's team:

Recovering Service Member (RSM)

Your wounded, ill, or injured service member.

Recovery Care Coordinator (RCC)

RCCs are employed by your loved one's service branch, and are assigned to RSMs with *serious* wounds, illnesses, and injuries. An RCC is a trained professional assigned to provide oversight and assistance to your recovering service member. The RCC will identify your service member's personal and professional needs and goals and compile them into a Comprehensive Recovery Plan. (CRP).

Federal Recovery Coordinator (FRC)

FRCs perform the same tasks as RCCs, but are employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs and assigned to RSMs with severe wounds, illnesses, and injuries who will likely retire from military service.

Medical Care Case Manager (MCCM)

A trained professional with a medical background, often as a nurse case manager, assigned to help RSMs understand their condition and treatment and to make sure they receive necessary health care.

The Recovery Process

While your service member is recovering, you will often hear people talk about the three phases of healing:

Recovery → Rehabilitation → Reintegration

Recovery

The Recovery phase begins at the time of injury or diagnosis and ends with release from acute inpatient care—that is, when your service member is discharged from the hospital.

Key events in this phase may include:

- Service member's arrival at a military treatment facility in the United States
- Notification of family members
- Family or other caregiver receives Invitational Travel Orders (ITOs) to travel to hospital bedside
- Treatments begin in hospital setting
- Medical assessment by team of physicians and determination of category rating of the injury
- Assignment of a Recovery Care Coordinator (RCC), case managers, and a team of experts, as needed
- Non-medical needs assessment to determine the service member's and family's financial and other needs
- Development of a Comprehensive Recovery Plan (CRP), including targets and goals to serve as a road map through recovery

The Recovery phase may be a time of great pain and stress for your service member and family. Your service member's medical treatment will be the top priority at this time, and it may feel as though the rest of your life is on hold. You may have to hold down the fort by keeping track of finances, child care, employment, and all the other aspects of your family life while your service member focuses on recovery.

This will be a time to work toward manageable, short-term goals like getting through a surgery, following medical instructions, beginning to smile again, and staying in touch with family and others who are close to you. Be sure to take advantage of all the help you can get during this difficult time, including emotional help such as counseling, which is available to both families and service members. Recovery Care Coordinators can give you information on programs and services to support both you and your service member.

Some advice on transitions

Every person's recovery experience will be different. But one thing you can count on is that the process of healing will involve many transitions. As your service member progresses from Recovery through Rehabilitation to Reintegration, you will experience transitions between different types of treatments, care providers, and locations.

Transitions are necessary and they represent progress. They can also be challenging. Moving to a new location or building relationships with new care providers can be physically and emotionally exhausting for service members and for families. It can be easy for important medical information to get lost in the shuffle between care providers and treatment facilities. And your family may have to take on the task of learning a new facility's regulations and floor plan.

Many professionals will help you along the way. But you, the caregiver, can play a unique and important role in easing these transitions. You can think ahead and ask people to give you names and contact information for key people in the next phase of treatment. You can ask questions to make sure your service member's needs are met and that nothing falls through the cracks.

Finally, if you make sure to keep the *Medical Journal* in this notebook up-to-date, the information you gather will help care providers continue treatment smoothly through many kinds of transitions.

Being an Active Member of the Recovery Team

You are extremely important to your service member's recovery. But it can take a while to fully understand your active role in the Recovery Team. These suggestions can help:

- *Know who is providing care.* Learn names and specialties and write this information down in the *Medical Journal* in this notebook.
- *Learn everything you can about your service member's condition.* Talk with doctors, nurses, and other care providers. Be sure to read any written medical information they provide. Knowledge will help alleviate fear of the unknown and help you make better decisions.
- *Learn the hospital's schedule and routines.* Be there to take notes when the Recovery Team visits your service member. Be aware of shift changes and times when staff is less available.
- *Write your questions down ahead of time.* It can be easy to forget things if you don't write them down. There is space in the Medical Journal for questions.
- *Ask for explanations of procedures and medications.* If you don't understand something, ask questions until you do understand.
- *Remember that the diagnosis and treatment plan may change.* Be flexible and try to stay positive.
- *Learn patient and caregiver rights and responsibilities.* Ask for a copy of your medical treatment facility's description of patient and caregiver rights and responsibilities. This may also be available on the MTF's Web site.
- *Take note of your service member's moods and feelings.* The healing process involves both physical and emotional aspects. It's important to talk with caregivers about any behavior changes you might notice.
- *Remember that your observations are unique and valuable.* You will spend more time with your service member than any other member of the Recovery Team can, and may notice things that they cannot.

Communicating with the Recovery Team

Sometimes it will feel as though doctors and military people are speaking another language and you're the only one who doesn't understand. You will be expected to learn new words and acronyms when your mind is full of emotion and your life is in upheaval. Sometimes you will have to make important decisions after hearing unpleasant news. It can make anyone feel overwhelmed.

In circumstances like these, it can be hard to communicate well, but you will get better results if you try. Begin now to practice effective communication in order to build relationships of trust with members of the Recovery Team. Here are some suggestions from other people who have been in situations similar to yours:

- *Be assertive in a friendly way.* Don't say, "Yes, I understand," if you don't understand. Ask for clarification, again and again if necessary. There are no dumb questions and you can't afford to be shy. You need to understand as much as possible.
- *Remember that the medical team takes care of many patients, but that you take care of one.* Speak up to make sure that your service member's needs are met, but try to be patient when members of the medical team are doing their best to help many people.
- *Keep in mind that all these people are on your side.* You are on the same team, rooting for your service member's recovery. Try to trust and support each other.
- *Recognize that when you are stressed, scared, or confused you may need to step back from your emotions to communicate effectively.* If you feel rushed to make a decision but can't think clearly, ask for a few minutes to clear your head. Count to ten or step outside and take some time to calm down.
- *Be friendly with the people around you.* You will find that they can help you in many ways. Remembering to say "please" and "thank you," even when you feel stressed, seems like a small gesture, but it in the end, civilities like these can make a big difference in how you, your service member, and the rest of the Recovery Team feel.

Taking Care of Yourself

It can be easy to forget about your own needs when you're worried about a loved one. But it's important to take care of your health so that you have the strength and energy to face the challenges ahead.

It's important to:

- *Eat healthy meals.* If you don't have the appetite for ordinary meals, try eating smaller healthy snacks throughout the day.
- *Drink water.* It's easy to become dehydrated, which can bring on headaches an energy loss, when you're under stress. Try to keep a bottle of water with you throughout the day.
- *Get some sleep.* This can be difficult when you are under stress. It can help to:
  - Limit caffeine (especially in the late afternoon or evening).
  - Avoid watching stressful TV programming—for example, news programs—in the hour before you go to sleep.
- *Rest when you can.* This can be hard when you're under stress, but it's important. Try doing deep-breathing exercises several times a day. (Close your eyes and count slowly to five as you breathe in, and count again to five as you breathe out. Repeat several times.)
- *Get some exercise.* Even short walks, indoors or out, can help your body and mind deal with stress.
- *Reduce other stress in your life.* Others will understand that your loved one is your priority now. Eliminate nonessential activities and let others help you.
- *Identify a "spokesperson."* This family member or friend will update friends, relatives, and others about your service member's condition. Taking on this task yourself can be overwhelming. You may want to contact CaringBridge (*www.caringbridge.com*), an organization that helps families set up Web sites to provide information to friends and relatives about the patient's progress.
- *When people offer to help, accept the offer.* Suggest specific things that they can do.
- *Acknowledge how you feel.* Talk to others or write in a journal. You may want to set aside a time each day to call and talk with a trusted friend or relative.
- *Seek spiritual guidance if religious beliefs are part of your life.* Even if you have not been an active member of your faith's congregation, a chaplain or other clergy member will understand if you seek help now.

What Different Kinds of Care Providers Do

You are likely to meet many different kinds of medical care providers during treatment and recovery, including doctors, nurses, and therapists. This list can help you understand who they are and what they do.

Doctors, including medical specialists and surgeons

Some doctors, called "specialists," treat certain kinds of conditions and injuries. Some specialists also perform surgery.

- *internist:* specializes in diagnosis and medical treatment of adults
- *anesthesiologist:* provides and monitors anesthetics (agents that make sure a patient doesn't feel pain during medical procedures such as surgery)
- *cardiologist:* specializes in treatment of the heart; may do special procedures to correct some heart problems but refers most surgery to a cardiac surgeon
- *dermatologist:* specializes in treatment of the skin, including burns and skin infections
- *endocrinologist:* specializes in diseases of glands (for example, the thyroid gland); often treats diabetes
- *gastroenterologist:* specializes in conditions involving the digestive tract, including stomach and bowels
- *gynecologist:* specializes in the female reproductive system
- *neurologist:* specializes in the neurological system, especially the brain and nerves
- *oncologist:* specializes in tumors and cancer
- *ophthalmologist:* specializes in treatment of the eyes
- *orthopedist:* specializes in problems with bones, joints, and muscles
- *otolaryngologist:* specializes in ear, nose, and throat conditions
- *pathologist:* identifies infectious agents and examines specimens in order to diagnose disease
- *physiatrist:* specializes in rehabilitation medicine (also called physical medicine) for life-changing injuries
- *plastic surgeon:* specializes in the repair and reconstruction of parts of the body

- *physical therapist (also called a "PT"):* teaches patients how to regain strength and mobility by doing exercises and using their bodies properly.
- *speech therapist:* works to help service members who need to improve their speech, often after brain injury or stroke.

Mental health care providers

Several kinds of providers can help service members with emotional or mental health problems, such as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder):

- *psychologist:* counsels people with emotional or mental health problems. A psychologist may have a Ph.D. and be called "doctor," but is not a medical doctor and cannot prescribe medications.
- *psychiatrist:* a medical doctor who specializes in treating mental and emotional problems and counseling patients, and who may prescribe medications.
- *social worker:* counsels people about emotional problems and guides them to other resources that can help. A social worker usually has a master's degree in social work.
- *mental health counselor:* counsels people with mental health or emotional problems. A mental health counselor usually has a graduate degree in psychology or education, but is not a medical doctor.

Acronym Dictionary

The military often uses abbreviations—or "acronyms"—as shorthand for longer terms. For example, "DoD" is an acronym for "Department of Defense."

Here are other acronyms you may encounter, especially in a military medical setting:

Terms related to injuries and treatment

- **MEDEVAC**: Medical Evacuation (often by helicopter)
- **MTF, MMTF**: Military Treatment Facility or Military Medical Treatment Facility, for example:
  - **LRMC**: Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (Landstuhl, Germany)
  - **NNMC**: National Naval Medical Center, commonly called "Bethesda" (Bethesda, Maryland)
  - **NMCSD**: Naval Medical Center San Diego, commonly called "Balboa" (San Diego, California)
  - **BAMC**: Brooke Army Medical Center (Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas)
  - **WRAMC**: Walter Reed Army Medical Center (Washington, DC)
- **OT**: Occupational Therapy
- **PT**: Physical Therapy
- **SI**: Seriously Injured; **NSI**: Not Seriously Injured; **VSI**: Very Seriously Injured
- **SPECAT**: Special Category (of injury)
- **WIA**: Wounded in Action

Medical conditions

- **COS**: Combat/Operational Stress
- **PTSD**: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- **SCI**: Spinal Cord Injury
- **TBI**: Traumatic Brain Injury

- **CONUS**: Continental U.S.; **OCONUS**: Outside the Continental U.S.
- **DFAS**: Defense Finance Accounting Service
- **DoD**: Department of Defense
- **FRG**: Family Readiness Group
- **FMLA**: Family and Medical Leave Act
- **ITOs**: Invitational Travel Orders
- **MLO**: Marine Liaison Office
- **NMA**: Non-Medical Attendant
- **NOK**: Next of Kin; **PNOK**: Primary Next of Kin; **SNOK**: Secondary Next of Kin
- **OCONUS**: Outside the Continental U.S.; **CONUS**: Continental U.S.
- **OEF**: Operation Enduring Freedom
- **OIF**: Operation Iraqi Freedom
- **PNOK**: Primary Next of Kin; **NOK**: Next of Kin; **SNOK**: Secondary Next of Kin
- **SNOK**: Secondary Next of Kin; **PNOK**: Primary Next of Kin; **NOK**: Next of Kin
- **SSN**: Social Security Number
- **TSGLI**: Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance
- **VA**: Department of Veterans Affairs
- **VBA**: Veterans Benefit Administration
- **VSO**: Veteran Service Officer

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WOUNDED WARRIOR REGIMENT
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IN REPLY REFER TO:
3 Jan 2011

Dear Marine and Family:

On behalf of a grateful Nation and the United States Marine Corps, I thank you for your dedicated service, personal commitment and the many sacrifices that you have made in support of the Marine Corps. So that you receive the support, resources, and services necessary to help you through the recovery process, the Commandant of the Marine Corps established the Wounded Warrior Regiment. The Regiment, which includes Wounded Warrior Battalions East and West and their detachments around the world, is dedicated to supporting all wounded, ill, and injured Marines and their families as they transition through the various phases of recovery. The Regiment's assets include: Recovery Care Coordinators who are the civilian point of contact to help Marines identify the services and resources needed to achieve their goals for recovery; Section Leaders who provide the leadership, motivation, and mentorship to assist Marines in achieving their goals; and non-medical care managers who provide Marines and their families with administrative support and information regarding benefits and compensation.

The coming weeks or months of recovery may be difficult, but rest assured there is an experienced group of medical professionals, case managers and a multi-disciplinary team of individuals available to you. Additionally, the Regiment's dedicated family support staff is available to help with your questions or concerns. They will provide you with up-to-date information on the resources and programs available to best suit your needs.

The enclosed Keeping It All Together handbook is designed to help you document and organize important information. We hope this handbook will assist you through your journey and we welcome your feedback as you access the various types of services, resources and support.

Thank you again for your service to our great Nation. We are committed to supporting you. Semper Fidelis.

JOHN L. MAYER
Colonel, USMC
Commanding Officer
Wounded Warrior Regiment

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