

## Wounded Warrior Project Increases Commitment to Improve Veteran Mental Health Care



WWP CEO Mike Linnington makes the announcement at the Intrepid Air, Sea & Space Museum.

Last fall, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) announced a five-year extension of the ground-breaking Warrior Care Network. In addition to their \$160 million dollar investment, Wounded Warrior Project leads a unique partnership with four world-renowned academic medical centers (AMCs), providing veteran-centric comprehensive care, aggregating data, sharing best practices, and coordinating treatment in an unprecedented manner. A first-of-its kind collaboration between WWP and the VA further expands the Warrior Care Network continuum of care, enabling successful discharge planning and a path to long-term wellness for veterans who complete the program.

WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington joined veterans, special guests, WWP and AMC leadership to announce the expansion at a press conference aboard the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York. "We're grateful to be able to help warriors access world-class mental health treatment," said Linnington. "We're humbled by the support of the nation that

allows us to commit to this care."

WWP launched Warrior Care Network in January 2016 to address the invisible wounds of war and improve outcomes for veterans living with cognitive and psychological issues. Partnering with Operation Mend at UCLA Health, the Veterans Program at Emory Healthcare, Road Home at Rush University Medical Center, and Home Base at Massachusetts General Hospital, Warrior Care Network provides a year's worth of mental health care during a 2-3 week intensive outpatient program (IOP). Warriors who complete the Warrior Care Network

program have seen a statistically significant reduction in PTSD and depression symptoms, translating into increased function and participation in life.

"The early impact of Warrior Care Network has proven to be very promising in treating wounded veterans for PTSD," said Lt. Col. (Ret.) Mike Richardson, WWP vice president of independence services and mental health. "We are now ready to increase the number of warriors treated across the nation."



### MIKE'S MESSAGE

Mike Richardson



I'm continuously amazed at the work that we do every single day which saves lives. We continue to lead how veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and other invisible wounds of war are treated and will be treated for generations to come. As a Network, we are focused on improving outcomes, increasing access to our world-class care, exercising our data, and continuing our incredible collaborative efforts, which is what makes us unique and drives our innovation.

Our collective commitment for the next five-plus years will continue to change the landscape of mental health care - broader than just our innovative models of treatment. We will also help reduce stigma, improve reimbursement, and build trust and partnerships along our journey. This is quite evident by a number of recent developments - such as doubling the capacity of our IOP through expansion and our willingness to fund and test additional programming including treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury, as well as testing a substance use disorder/co-occurring diagnosis IOP. We are also testing and implementing an accelerated clinical program, as well as creating

*continued on page 2* ▶



WARRIOR CARE NETWORK®

**MIKE'S MESSAGE**

*continued from page 1*

and measuring supplemental family programming. Finally, WWP is proud to provide financial support for OpMend's highly impactful surgical program.

While we have a lot to be proud of as we reflect on where we were just a few short years ago (even from this time last year), I am very excited about what lies ahead for us. In the next 6-12 months we will be working diligently on the sustainability of our Network, how we tell our story, and how we can impact the lives of our warriors and their families even more.

As we revamp our Network News, please help us share this with those who share our passion to heal the invisible wounds of our warriors and their families.



Mike Richardson  
vice president of independence  
services and mental health  
Wounded Warrior Project

WCN FACT

OVER  
**100,000**

HOURS OF INTENSIVE  
OUTPATIENT CARE INCLUDING  
PTSD THERAPY AND HOLISTIC  
SERVICES TO OUR WARRIORS.

WE'RE LEADING A NATIONWIDE  
★ **BATTLE AGAINST THE** ★  
**INVISIBLE WOUNDS OF WAR**



★  ★

**WARRIOR  
CARE NETWORK**

WOUNDED WARRIOR  
**BILL GEIGER**

**AROUND THE NETWORK**



**Rush Wins Davies Award of Excellence**

The Healthcare Information Management Systems Society (HIMSS), the world's leading healthcare information technology group, awarded Rush University Medical Center the coveted Davies Award of Excellence for the innovative and effective Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) that resulted in very clinically significant reductions in PTSD and depression among combat veterans.

and has resulted in it becoming one of the most effective intensive treatment programs in the country.

**CHALLENGE:**

Road Home researchers recognized that approximately 23% of veterans who served in the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite the availability of effective evidence-based treatments for PTSD, research has suggested that less than 20% of these veterans actually receive these interventions. Close to 40% do not complete these interventions and therefore do not receive adequate therapeutic doses. Consequently, it is important to identify ways to increase access to evidence-based PTSD treatments and to help veterans stay engaged in treatment so that they can complete their course of therapy.

**IMPLEMENTATION:**

Program leaders worked to address this by systematically capturing clinical data, including but not limited to PTSD and depression symptom severity, at various time points, using existing technology available through the electronic medical records and survey tools. All data-capture tools were designed with input from clinicians, researchers, and system administrators to ensure that the collection of program data could be completed in short amounts of time to minimize any potential burden on clinicians. Moreover, the systems were designed so that captured data could be easily extracted and analyzed to assist with program evaluation.

To address these critical needs, the Road Home researchers, in conjunction with Wounded Warrior Project, developed an intensive treatment program for veterans with PTSD. The three-week-long program offers a combination of evidence-based

**END RESULT & TAKEAWAY:**

As a result, clinicians were able to improve access to evidence-based treatments for veterans with PTSD. Ongoing data-driven program evaluation led to continuous improvements in program effectiveness. Clinical outcomes from the three-week-long intensive program demonstrate that the intensive program is highly effective and that participation in the program leads to

**23%** OF VETERANS WHO SERVED IN THE CURRENT CONFLICTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ SUFFER FROM PTSD

large reductions in PTSD symptoms. In addition, program completion rates are much higher (91.5%)

PTSD treatments and adjunctive services.

Since it first began to offer intensive treatment services in 2015, the Road Home Program has closely tracked clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction through custom flowsheets in the electronic medical records and external survey tools. By continuously analyzing its program-based data, such as veterans' PTSD symptom improvement over the course of the three-week-long program and at short-, medium, and long-term follow-up time points, Road Home Program has been able to make changes to further increase its effectiveness

compared to standard outpatient PTSD treatment. Veterans also report very high satisfaction with the three-week-long intensive program and would recommend it to their veteran peers.

The organization was able to standardize the Road Home Program data capture system and share it with other academic medical centers who offer similar programs for veterans with PTSD. As a result, PTSD programs and clinical outcomes can be directly compared to ensure that the veterans served receive the highest quality care possible.

# AROUND THE NETWORK

★ ATLANTA

## EMORY EVENTS



**EMORY**  
HEALTHCARE

Veterans Program

## No Significant Difference Between PTSD Treatments

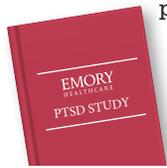
Dr. Sheila Rauch, Clinical Director of the Emory Healthcare Veterans Program, was the Principal Investigator of a study of United States combat veterans who suffered from PTSD. The study found no significant difference between two of the most common treatments for PTSD and no benefit for combination treatment.

treatments for PTSD in veterans, both resulting in large reductions in symptoms,” says Rauch.

The study also examined mechanisms and predictors of change. Additional publications will be forthcoming to address questions of who responds better to medication versus prolonged exposure therapy as well as what mechanisms may be involved.

The study results were published in the December 5, 2018 online issue of the Journal of the American Association (JAMA) Psychiatry.

[Click here to read more about this study](#)



“Our study is the first to compare psychotherapy and medications in veterans with PTSD. The findings provide guidance for clinicians that both prolonged exposure therapy and sertraline are effective

## Retreat Initiates Five-Year Strategic Plan



CAMP  
SOUTHERN  
GROUND

Emory Healthcare Veterans Program (EHVP) kicked off the new year with a retreat at Camp Southern Ground (CSG) in Fayetteville, GA, on January 3, 2019. CSG is a nonprofit camp that was created by Grammy Award-winning artist Zac Brown, of the Zac Brown Band. Its mission includes working with Veterans to assist them with reintegration into their communities after military service. Given CSG’s interest in veterans and the possibility of a partnership, hosting our retreat there helped to define and operationalize this partnership – which is now a reality!

The retreat was led by Lt. General (ret.) Burke Garrett. The EHVP was divided into three teams, and each came up with its own purpose, values, mission, and vision. The



Camp attendees identify purpose, values, mission, and vision.

teams then presented their ideas, which was the initiation of our five-year strategic plan that will be completed in late 2019. The retreat was a huge success, with all team members highly engaged and committed to a bright future for the EHVP and the veterans and service members who we proudly serve.

## ★ WARRIOR FEATURE ★



## Joe Merritt

Marine Corps veteran Joe Merritt survived an explosion in Iraq in 2004. For the past 15 years, he has survived the aftermath of that explosion: anger, irritability, trouble sleeping, isolation. All symptoms of PTSD. Joe didn’t address his challenges until connecting with WWP and learning about Warrior Care Network.

Through the intensive outpatient care at Emory Healthcare Veterans Program, Joe learned to address his anxiety around crowds, developed coping skills to face daily issues that usually left him on edge, and started to become the man he was before he deployed.

“I have gotten upset, but not like I used to. I can feel a difference in my thinking. I attribute a lot of that to Warrior Care Network and Emory.”



★ [Click here to read more of Joe's story](#)



Keep an eye out for future editions of the Network, where we will feature various partners of the Warrior Care Network. We are very fortunate to have several outside organizations engaged with our Network.

★ **The Bush Institute’s Warrior Wellness Alliance** is making great strides in their drive to optimize the veteran space with a focus on peer-to-peer networks as well as world-class care providers.

★ Our work with Dr. Magali Haas and the **Cohen Veterans Bioscience** is about to

take off in earnest, and we look forward to possibly having her and her team at our next ESC.

★ We continue to work closely with the **DoD and VA Suicide Prevention offices** as we work to reduce/eliminate veteran suicides.

★ Other external partners include: **RAND, Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute**, and a host of other community-based organizations, to name a few.

## ★ WCN ON THE HILL ★

### Advocating For All Veterans



116th Congress addresses veterans issues.

In January 2019, legislators commenced the first session of the 116th Congress with over 100 new members (19 of them veterans) and a new leadership team in the House of Representatives. Democrats will control the House for the first time since 2010, and forecasters predict a steady stream of oversight hearings to examine the executive branch. In the veterans space, expect that focus to fall on implementation of major legislation passed in the 115th Congress including disability appeals reform, electronic health record modernization, higher education, and community care.

**Above all else, veterans and the service organizations that support them are continuing to monitor the rollout of the VA MISSION Act, the signature bill of 2018 that will reform access to community-based care beginning in June 2019.**

After weeks of criticism for poor engagement with community advocates in the drafting process, the VA announced its MISSION Act “access standards” in January. Under the expiring Choice program, veterans could go to the private sector if they would have to wait 30 days or travel 40 miles for care in the VA. Under the proposed regulations, those standards will be changed to 20 days or a 30-minute drive for access to primary care or mental health care, and 28 days or a 60-minute drive for specialty care.

While the impact of the MISSION Act will be felt across the veteran health community, legislation passed with the support of the Warrior Care Network – the Sexual Trauma Response and Treatment (START) Act, which is poised for implementation in 2019. After the three-year pilot program was authorized in August 2018, legislators moved to appropriate \$2 million for FY19, and the Department of Defense has assigned personnel to lead the agency's response. Warrior Care Network advocates are preparing to brief the agency in February in hopes of galvanizing support to move forward with the pilot and will work with Congress to secure additional funding for FY20.

## AROUND THE NETWORK

★ LOS ANGELES

### UCLA UPDATE



### Welcome New Executive Director Troy Simon



UCLA is excited to introduce their new Executive Director, Troy Simon. Troy began his career in healthcare as an undergraduate at the U.S. Air Force Academy. In his senior year, he was selected as the #1 choice for the healthcare administration career out of his Air Force Academy class of 1,067 cadets. After graduating in 1992, he spent five years as the Administrator of Medical Operations with the 77th Medical

Group at McClellan/Mather Air Force Base, transitioning into a civilian career in healthcare administration. Troy's most recent position was with California Cancer Associates for Research and Excellence, Inc., where he served for five years as CEO.

Troy grew up in Ohio, where he was an avid baseball player. He played all four years at the Air Force Academy, but passed up the opportunity to play professional baseball in order to fulfill his commitment to the Air Force. After living in Los Angeles for seven years, Troy has finally become a Dodgers fan.

### Operation Mend Buddy Program Update

The Operation Mend Buddy Program is designed to fulfill UCLA's warriors' non-medical needs. By carefully matching warriors and their families with loving, caring individuals, couples or families that live in close proximity to UCLA (our Operation Mend Buddies), they give them the opportunity to engage in activities beyond UCLA's clinic and hotel walls.

Gary is a native Californian, born and raised in the Greater Los Angeles Area. A UCLA alumnus, he works in the investment management industry in Century City. The Buddy Program is a great opportunity for him to stay connected with the university, while helping wounded warriors and their families heal through social engagement. Gary first became a UCLA Operation Mend Buddy in 2013. Since then, he has had the honor of spending a significant amount of time with 11 warriors, some with and some without caregivers, doing things they mutually enjoy: watching sports, listening to music, going to the movies, and dining out. Gary particularly likes being an unofficial tour guide of the UCLA campus.

One veteran with whom Gary really connected had asked to see the movie John Wick: Chapter 2. Gary was concerned by the film's violence, but his buddy assured him that he was fine with the almost comic book style of the Hollywood action movie. He ended up really enjoying it, and afterward

they headed out for a casual Italian dinner. They spent hours chatting about the soldier's background, experience in the military, and other topics. The man told Gary that he had not spoken with anyone like that for a long time and admitted that he had been secluded and in a dark place over the past year. Gary felt that they had formed a real bond that evening. Now they stay in touch between visits, and each time the veteran returns to



GARY GHAZARIAN (LEFT) PICTURED WITH OPERATION MEND VETERAN

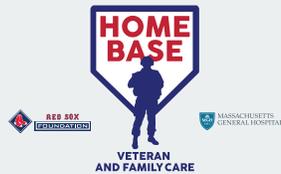
UCLA for care, they get together and pick up where they left off.

For Gary, being part of the Buddy Program has been one of the greatest experiences. He is almost embarrassed to say how much he enjoys participating in it. Being around these brave men and women is a humbling experience. They have been through so much pain and suffering, both physically and psychologically, but without exception, they are gracious and appreciative of the Buddies who take time to be with them and become part of their healing journey. Gary strongly believes that as a civilian and one of 99.4 percent of the population that has not served in the military, he has a moral obligation to do whatever he can to help those who serve. Being in the Buddy Program enables him to fulfill that obligation in a small way. Gary also is grateful to Dana, Clare, and the entire staff at OpMend for letting him be part of this amazing program. The fact that it is at his alma mater makes it even better. Go Bruins!

# AROUND THE NETWORK

★ BOSTON

**MASS GENERAL NEWS**



## Home Base Unveils New National Center of Excellence



**Distinguished guests christen new Home Base headquarters.**

Continuing to scale its innovative and effective approach to mental health and brain injury care for veterans, service members, and their families, Home Base, a Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital Program, officially opened the doors to its National Center of Excellence and cut the ceremonial ribbon for its new location in the Charlestown Navy Yard on September 28. This Center will double Home Base's capacity, delivering a broad range of key innovations to its design, providing the space and resources needed to significantly enhance the mental healthcare and support services provided to service members, veterans, and their families dealing with the invisible wounds.

Guests came from near and far to attend the headquarters' opening, including nearly 250 federal, state, and city officials as well as, business, healthcare, and military and veterans' leaders. Special guests included U.S. Senator Edward Markey, who shared the importance of Home Base for the community. "With Home Base, there is a program that speaks to what

our veterans are facing," Markey said. "Home Base not only understands veterans, but the interconnection between their service and mental health – and how to help them." "Home Base is the model that gives the help and the care our veterans and their families need."

Home Base also welcomed MA Governor Charlie Baker, who spoke on behalf of the state of Massachusetts – a state that prioritizes mental healthcare – about the program's success and progress throughout the years. "This is the most important innovation in the way we help the men and women coming back from the combat theater. Home Base is such a gift to anyone in the uniform serving our country and the Commonwealth."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**"This is the most important innovation in the way we help the men and women coming back from the combat theater."**

**– Charlie Baker**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Center was funded entirely through the support of individuals and organizations in the community. "Moving into our new home allows us to finally match the top quality of care at Home Base with the space and environment that surrounds it," said Home Base Executive Director Brigadier General (ret.) Jack Hammond. "This Center will enable us to better meet the critical needs

for our services by doubling our capacity and serve more people in need. I'm proud of this moment and of what we deliver to heal the invisible wounds of our military, veterans, and their families."

Massachusetts General Hospital President Dr. Peter Slavin shared the importance of the Red Sox- MGH partnership and addressed the need of mental healthcare for veterans and military families. "Our Massachusetts General Hospital Partnership with the Red Sox has been incredibly powerful. Home Base ensures that no one who returns from war is forgotten by providing them access to treatment they so richly deserve."

After the ribbon cutting, guests and neighbors were invited to tour the clinical



**Our expanded services at Home Base are a shining example of America's delivery on our debt of gratitude for the women, men, and families who have sacrificed so much for our country's protection**

**– Michael Allard**



space and take photos with the 2013 Red Sox World Series Trophy – a gift from Red Sox Chairman Tom Werner as the team worked to reclaim their championship title in the 2018 World Series against the LA Dodgers. Additional special guests included: MA Attorney General Maura Healey; Boston Mayor Marty Walsh; MA Veterans Services Secretary Francisco Ureña; MA Senator Mike Rush; and City of Boston Veterans' Services Commissioner Giselle Sterling, in addition to first responder leaders from across the state, including Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian; Boston Police Commissioner William Gross; Boston Fire Chief Joe Finn; Chelsea Police Chief Brian Kyes; Natick Police Chief Jim Hicks; and MBTA Transit Police Superintendent Richard Sullivan.

Since the opening of its new headquarters, Home Base has been off to a busy start. The clinic has already seen nearly 316 veterans and family members for clinical care and support, doubled the number of veterans and families served in the two-week Intensive Clinical Program (ICP), expanded its wellness programs, and piloted new programs for veterans dealing with substance abuse.

"Our expanded services at Home Base are a shining example of America's delivery on our debt of gratitude for the women, men, and families who have sacrificed so much for our country's protection," said Michael Allard, Chief Operating Officer, Home Base. "They've earned and deserve the right to receive world-class care, healing, and hope – and we hope this new space illustrates our commitment to them and their well-being."