

Caring for VETERANS

Shepherd Center and Humana Military Healthcare Services partner with philanthropist to fill gaps in coverage for U.S. soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan.

BY LARRY BOWIE



Photo by Army Spc. Daniel Lowe, Courtesy of U.S. Dept. of Defense

Shepherd Center and Humana Military Healthcare Services recently formed a partnership with Home Depot co-founder and philanthropist Bernie Marcus to help wounded U.S. soldiers and their families obtain additional care to promote their recovery from combat-related injuries.

The program, called the SHARE Initiative, began Jan. 1, 2008 for military men and women who were wounded during their service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as their families. The program initially will concentrate on cases in the Southeast, then expand to a larger scope.

“The partnership allows Shepherd Center to complement the care already given through the Military Treatment Facilities system and the Veterans Administration by offering our world-renowned medical and rehabilitation care to U.S. service men and women returning from combat with catastrophic injuries, such as traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury,” says Dr. Donald Peck Leslie, medical director of Shepherd Center.

Marcus is acting as a benefactor for wounded service members to help pay for necessary medical rehabilitation, post-acute rehabilitation, and community and family support services administered at Shepherd Center that may fall outside of their coverage under TRICARE, the organization that administers health benefits for members of the military and their dependents. The program also targets soldiers who live in rural areas and don't have nearby access to the types of specialized services they may need.

Marcus, who along with his wife Billi, has been a longtime supporter of Shepherd Center programs, decided to provide the funding for the SHARE Initiative to make a difference in the lives of wounded soldiers.

“These people are giving their lives for us, so I contacted Shepherd Center to ask one question, ‘How can I help?’” Marcus says.

Many cases that will be seen at Shepherd likely will involve traumatic brain injury (TBI), Dr. Leslie notes. Army officials estimate that 10 to 20 percent of troops leaving Iraq and Afghanistan have signs of concussion, or mild traumatic brain injury. TBI is often called the “signature wound” of the war. Blasts from explosions are the most common cause.

Symptoms can include problems with memory, attention, concentration and sleeping, as well as headaches, confusion, dizziness, nausea and irritability. These symptoms are also similar in people suffering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can make diagnosis and treatment more difficult.

The partnership creates a unique program at Shepherd Center with a mission to complement the care provided to members of the military by offering specialized rehabilitation and community reintegration services that insurance does not require, but that Shepherd Center believes is important for people to reach their fullest recovery following a spinal cord or traumatic brain injury.

The vision of the SHARE Initiative is to create an integrated partnership focused on the enhancement of hope and recovery for the wounded warrior. In addition, Shepherd Center and Humana Military Healthcare Services are working collaboratively to raise awareness of available services, obtain early identification and referral of wounded warriors, and identify family members who need additional education and assistance in navigating their way through the recovery process.

Services that could be offered under the SHARE Initiative include neuropsychological evaluation to assess for TBI and PTSD, cognitive therapy, counseling, activity- and community-based rehabilitation, residential services and respite care for family members, and housing while services are being delivered. Services also could include assistive technology devices, cognitive prosthetics and home healthcare equipment, such as bathroom equipment and canes.

“We are proud to be affiliated with this worthwhile initiative to assist our wounded service members in their recovery process,” says Dave Baker, president and CEO of Humana Military Healthcare Services. “The collaboration efforts between Humana Military and Shepherd Center have created a much-needed program, and I commend Mr. Marcus for his leadership and desire to help this deserving population.”

Above: Shepherd Center and Humana Military Healthcare Services have formed a partnership with Home Depot co-founder and Shepherd board member Bernie Marcus to help wounded U.S. soldiers – such as this one in Afghanistan – and their families obtain additional care to promote their recovery from combat-related injuries.