
Defense Report

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Health Care for Soldiers—They Deserve and Get the Best

In past years, Congressional testimony by the Surgeons General of the three military departments has painted a gloomy picture of military medical care. Even the Pentagon's top health official, Dr. William Mayer, has labeled the military health care system "not ready for war...not ready for peace." Fortunately, their warnings have not fallen on deaf ears.

Congress has provided funds for the deployment of fully equipped hospital "packages" overseas. To meet the need for trained health care professionals to staff these battlefield medical units, Congress has also provided incentives to encourage doctors and nurses to join one of the reserve components and has proposed legislation for registration by the Selective Service System of persons qualified in health care occupations that are essential to the Armed Forces.

At the same time the military departments must meet a statutory and moral obligation to provide health care for about 10 million people, of whom only 20 percent are on active duty. In the last several years, a few isolated problems have surfaced that fed the misperception that this largest-in-the-world medical system was a second-rate one.

The services are making important improvements to the quality of medicine provided our men and women in uniform and to those who served before them and all their families. Among these are: strict credentialing and firm licensing requirements for the providers of military health care, limits on off-duty employment, prompt corrective action for reported substandard care and close supervision of nonphysicians.

To make the peacetime health care system more accessible to its beneficiaries, the military is trying a system of walk-in clinics under contract to qualified civilian health care providers. Additionally, the Army is completely automating its patient appointment system and has increased the number of support personnel to help improve the appointment process.

With the backing of Congress, these important changes in our military health care program will result in lasting excellence in quality, readiness and efficiency. Our soldiers and their families deserve no less.