

Total Force Fitness: Bridging Performance Optimization and Health Approaches for Warfighter Readiness

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Conference Themes (#3) From rehab to prehab - Putting the soldier back on track; (#4) From shell shock to mental fitness - Human Performance

Topics: High Performance

Summary: The U.S. Department of Defense supports Warfighter readiness and performance through Total Force Fitness (TFF) in support of Human Performance Optimization (HPO). This conceptual framework helps Warfighters and military units reach and sustain holistic health and performance and guides policy, program, research, and educational efforts within the U.S military. It includes social, physical, environmental, medical/dental, spiritual, nutritional, psychological, and financial health. This session provides an overview of current HPO/TFF efforts in the DoD and uses the psychological fitness domain to illustrate the value of full-spectrum approaches to caring for service members.

Methods-Results: This presentation begins by introducing the work of the Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP), a Department of Defense (DoD) Center of Excellence at the Uniformed Services University, and describing how CHAMP supports HPO with a capability-based approach focused on health and performance improvements essential for executing Warfighter's primary duties. HPO (figure 1) assumes a proactive stance to prevent conditions that challenge Warfighter health and performance. This contrasts with traditional healthcare models, where providers engage reactively with Service Members typically after injury. TFF and HPO offer a broadened paradigm for medical and operational communities to enable readiness.

To illustrate, psychological service delivery has evolved to include optimizing Service Member health and performance of mission essential tasks and preserving mission readiness. It has broadened beyond the sole goal of ameliorating psychological illness. The science of performance psychology offers a framework to provide Warfighters with mental skills required to enhance discrete performances across a broad range of tasks, from marksmanship, recovery from injury, execution of tactical strategy to decision-making and navigating complex environments. Focused human performance approaches can be leveraged to help preserve resources and increase engagement in mental health protective behaviors for Service Members.

Conclusion: Approaches to alleviating illness and supporting optimal performance are often viewed as completely independent at conceptual, practical, and policy levels. Engagement in a full-spectrum approach to health and performance can help warfighters capitalize on mental strengths and skills, promote overall well-being, mental health, and enable optimal performance while simultaneously decreasing the stigma associated with seeking and receiving support.

Figure 1

