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PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: MILITARY TREATMENT FACILITY (MTF) MISSIONS

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Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss the role Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) play in supporting military readiness.

As the commander of the 19th Medical Group at Little Rock Air Force Base, my team of approximately 350 dedicated practitioners are responsible for a population of 44,000 beneficiaries. Roughly 14,000 beneficiaries are enrolled directly to our facility and receive care in our various clinics. This population is composed of about 6,000 active duty members, 5,000 active duty family members and 3,000 retirees and their dependents.

Unlike many civilian outpatient facilities, the 19<sup>th</sup> Medical Group provides services such as radiology, laboratory, physical therapy, mental health, and dental services. Like most Air Force MTFs, we also have Public and Bioenvironmental Health, a Systems Flight, TRICARE Operations and Patient Administration (TOPA), Medical Management and a Facility Support team.

Our MTF directly supports “Team Little Rock,” which is composed of two active duty wings, a traditional Air National Guard wing and a Reserve Group. The 19<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing is part of Air Mobility Command (AMC) and is the host, while the 314<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing’s training mission falls under Air Education and Training Command (AETC). These separate entities surge forward to execute, generate and support unrivaled combat airlift...anywhere, anytime!

“Team Little Rock” continues to support our nation’s mission by having deployment-ready Airmen available on a moment’s notice. Over the past 18 months, our base averaged 300-400 Airmen deployed at any given time including 46 medics. We provide all the medical care necessary to ensure our base’s active duty population is ready to deploy, but we, ourselves must also be ready to deploy in relatively short order.

To that end, our primary focus is directed toward the numerous requirements needed to keep our Airmen combat ready. An Airman’s individual medical readiness is contingent upon

staying up-to-date on everything from immunizations, annual preventive health assessments, dental examinations and current laboratory tests. In addition to keeping Airmen from across the wing ready, our medical providers and technicians must find time in the midst of a very busy daily schedule to maintain their clinical currency and readiness training. These activities include hands-on readiness skills verification courses, disaster team training, numerous wing level exercises and continuing medical education.

We have from two to seven medical group members deployed at any given time. In many instances, Airmen require specific medical team training for their deployment that can take them out of the clinic for several weeks before they leave for their deployment. This readiness commitment has an impact on our patient appointment availability and is the single largest delineator between military medicine and civilian healthcare.

Despite the unique readiness challenges we face in military medicine, we average nearly 8,000 appointments across our clinics each month. In addition, we partner with a robust civilian provider

network to offer services we are unable to provide. The current civilian network, managed by Humana, contains 3,300 providers across the spectrum of required services. The network referral demand averages around 1,700 appointments per month.

The most unique skill set we have is our Aerospace Physiology/High Altitude Airdrop Mission Support (AOP/HAAMS) team. As the only provider of this service in the Department of Defense (DoD), this highly trained cadre of Airmen support Special Operators from all Services, DoD agencies, and allied nations. They train aircrew and Special Operators to recognize the signs and symptoms of hypoxia and decompression sickness in unpressurized environments which could have serious negative effects on the members involved. They also directly support missions involving unpressurized aircraft between 10,000 and 35,000 feet in altitude, and are required for missions above 20,000 feet.

Unquestionably, the pharmacy sees the most beneficiaries each day. They fill 1,100 prescriptions from in-house and off-base

providers each day. As the only active duty clinic in Arkansas, patients travel from areas all over the state to use our pharmacy. We are fortunate to have 35 civilians who volunteer to work in our pharmacy each week. Many are retired military members who still serve by donating their time and very positive attitudes while taking care of our pharmacy patients. Without these volunteers, our staff would be unable meet the demand of our beneficiary population.

The October 1, 2015, changes in the TRICARE prescription benefit requiring all non-active duty members to refill medication through military pharmacies (i.e., on-base) or through TRICARE's Home Delivery service, has increased prescription demand 8-10% compared to the same period last year. Even with educating our beneficiaries about the mail-order option to have refilled medications sent to their front door, our population reports enjoying the social experience of coming to the base where they can also take advantage of other benefits, such as the Commissary and Base Exchange. However, because of this we have wait times.

To alleviate this congestion, we are working with our local wing leadership and the Air Force Health Facilities Division to find a solution to further improve the pharmacy service we provide our beneficiaries.

At the end of the day, the medical group's primary mission is to ensure medically fit Airmen and ready medical Airmen to accomplish the wing's readiness mission when called upon. I have three priorities that keep my team focused: mission, people and communication. Mission is our first priority. It is the reason we exist and what we pour our daily efforts into. Our team is a vital part of Combat Airlift providing exceptional care, support and service to our patients and we continually look for the most efficient ways to accomplish this. The effort we put in each day is focused on promoting teamwork at all levels. Our mindset is to utilize the strengths each team member brings to form a cohesive unit while working together to solve the challenges we encounter.

Second, our people are a priority. Our amazing teammates are how we get the mission done and treat our patients, family

members, community partners and each other with the utmost respect and professionalism. We are committed to staying resilient in all areas of our lives, which makes us more productive and better team members to those around us. We also look for opportunities within the MTF, wing and community to grow personally and professionally to become better Airmen.

Our final priority is communication. There is no substitute for clear, concise communication at all levels, which allows our team to function at its peak. We are always seeking opportunities to improve our communication methods by listening more than we speak to include utilizing different sources of information across available spectrums to get pertinent messages to those we support.

In conclusion, it is truly an honor to lead the 19th Medical Group team. I am continually impressed by my team's efforts to serve our beneficiaries while taking care of each other in the process. It is a worthy calling and one we do not take lightly.

I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today and look forward to your questions.