



Friday, October 2 2009
AMA eVoice Weekly Newsletter
Oct. 2, 2009 - AMA eVoice®

From the President, J. James Rohack, MD

Treat the troops—mental health matters

As I noted in my [blog](#) Sept. 28, I had the honor to represent the AMA and speak at the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Walk for Awareness, which was held Sept. 27 at the American Legion Mall in Indianapolis. The site was impressive.

The 27 acres were donated after World War I to honor America's sons and daughters who have fought in wars to preserve America's freedom. The monuments were second only to Washington, D.C., in honoring those who have served in wars since the American Revolution. The layout mimics The National Mall, including a gold-caped obelisk in the form of a long rectangular depression that was designed as a reflecting pool but never filled in.

The AMA Foundation's [Fund for Better Health](#) provided a grant to

help make the walk happen, and the event was spearheaded by the Indiana State Medical Association (ISMA) Alliance, with the catalyst being incoming President Cami Pond. Her husband, Col. William Pond, MD, past president of the Fort Wayne Medical Society and state air surgeon with the Indiana National Guard, has been deployed numerous times and seen the problems that PTSD can create for returning troops and their families. The lack of awareness in the private sector for PTSD and for treatment options was a clear rallying cry for the ISMA Alliance to do something.

Working with Sen. Tom Wyss, R-Ind., and Rep. Phyllis Pond, R-Ind., of the Indiana General Assembly, proclamations of the PTSD Walk for Awareness were passed and announced by Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman. She noted in her remarks

that the number of Indiana Hoosiers deployed is disproportionate compared to other states.

The Adjutant General of Indiana, Maj. Gen. Martin Umbarger, remarked on how appreciative all the branches of the military were of the recognition of the private sector of the hidden trauma PTSD brought on individuals and families when soldiers return. He recognized those in the audience who served our nation in Vietnam and commented on how their return was so different from what's occurring now. They are an important part of our American fabric who have not had the appreciation as other sons and daughters who left America to serve our nation to fight on foreign soils. Their sacrifice and the PTSD they suffered was stigmatized.

The shuttle bus driver who drove me to the event and then to the airport was a Vietnam veteran. We discussed how America has changed and those who served in World War II are called "The Greatest Generation." But those who served in Vietnam, while part of the Baby Boomers, have not had the same recognition of service to our nation. Recognizing the possible effects PTSD can have on soldiers is the first step in the right direction.

During my remarks at the walk, I noted that PTSD is not just a military issue. Family members and

veterans who receive care in the private sector need to have private physicians who know about the problem and are able to refer to appropriate specialists for care. Nightmares, depression, debilitating headaches, heart disease and suicide are just some of the manifestations of PTSD. Treatment can be of help if the diagnosis is made.

I also noted that besides the military, others who face traumatic events may also develop PTSD. Firefighters, law enforcement officers, paramedics, and even nurses and physicians can suffer from PTSD. The condition is real, affects many and can be treated.

What happened in Indiana on Sept. 27 shows the power of one person working with an alliance, a state medical association and the AMA to make a positive difference. Though the walk was only a mile, a journey of 1,000 miles must begin with those first steps. I hope you will look at your own community and see where you can help raise awareness and provide support for those returning from serving our nation to make sure they have what they need to be productive in an American society where they put their life on the line to serve.

[E-mail comments, questions and replies to Dr. Rohack](#)