

## Caring for the Caregivers

Local healing center offers services to family and medical professionals touched by war

BY LINDSEY MCPHERSON

Crossings Healingworks, a non-profit organization, will start a weekly program this fall providing acupuncture and massage services to caregivers and family members of soldiers at Walter Reed Medical Center.

"The trauma of war isn't limited to the soldier who served or that of time of service or geographical location of service," said Alaine Duncan, executive director of Crossings Healingworks.

Duncan founded Crossings Healingworks after hearing the inspiring story of Marine Lance Cpl. Jeffrey Lucey. According to Duncan, Lucey came home from Iraq in 2003 and committed suicide in 2004 because he was unable to live with what he had seen and what he had been asked to do in Iraq. She heard his parents tell his story on the radio and it was the parent pain with which she identified.

"It was out of hearing this story that I realized I needed to create an institution to respond using complementary medicine to help people cope," Duncan said.

Since starting the organization in 2004, Duncan has been inviting soldiers' families and caregivers to receive services at reduced fees based on income.

The organization has also visited Walter Reed annually since 2005 during National Nurses Week, setting up a free clinic in the hospital to promote wellness and honor nurses and other caregivers and family members of soldiers.

People who received treatments at Crossings Healingworks' visits during Nurses Week left comments about the services such as "Mmm...so relaxing. A breath of fresh air in a house filled with smoke" and "I felt renewed and more energetic. Thanks." Many expressed a wish that the services be available more often.

After the second annual visit to Walter

Reed, Duncan noticed the toll stress had taken on the caregivers.

"In 2006, we saw some of the same people, but they looked so dramatically impacted by the stress of care giving," said Duncan.

It was after this visit that Duncan decided there needed to be a program that would make more frequent visits to provide services at Walter Reed.

"Very few people understand the impact on caregivers and the toll of taking care of soldiers who return home from war," said Duncan.

Officials at Walter Reed welcomed the opportunity for Crossings Healingworks to set up a once-a-week, all-day stress-reduction clinic, according to Duncan. This clinic will be called the Restore and Renew Wellness Clinic.

The project is currently in its fundraising stage, the final step left to be completed before the program officially starts. But with the recent award of a \$30,000 grant from the Consumer Health Foundation, the clinic should be opening this fall, said Duncan.

The Samuel Institute is also taking over part of the project by financing and conducting the research on the impact the clinic will have on the business model of the hospital. They will be looking at job satisfaction, staff retention, reductions in occupational health and safety incidents, use of sick days, etc.

"Understanding the ripple effect of healing is the cornerstone of our initiative," said Duncan.

Program Director Gail Chinoy explains the goals of the clinic: "First and foremost to bring stress relief to the staff, to create a place for the staff to come to that's easy and accessible and no cost to them [and] to show that providing stress relief for the staff will serve the hospital well."

The clinic will provide three main services: acupuncture, acupressure and massage. These services will be offered at Walter Reed once a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. so that people can come before work, after work or during breaks. Most sessions will last about 15 minutes, though patients can take more time or participate in more than one session depending on availability.

"Research shows that the people who have the best stress reduction results get both acupuncture and some body work," said Duncan.

These services can relieve stress-related problems in caregivers such as hypertension, high blood pressure, insomnia, anxiety, chronic pain, headaches and allergies.

"What's good for caregivers is good for their patients," Duncan said. "You can imagine the difference between a nurse who's slept all night and a nurse that's been up all night with nightmares reliving the scenes of her day."

Though the program works closely with victims of war, it doesn't seek to make a statement on the war itself.

"We're not taking a position on the war," said Duncan. "We're just trying to help transform the experience of war."

Duncan believes this is a universal issue people can agree on, no matter their stance on the war.

"This is an issue that people from red states and blue states can come together on," Duncan said. "People can come together in a positive way with passion and concern and they can unite."

### EARTHTALK

#### I want to give my baby fresh, organic food but I don't have the time to make her special meals.

Babies deserve the best possible start in life, so giving them nutritious food is a must, not only for good health but also to establish positive eating habits as early as possible.

According to Consumers Union (CU), publisher of Consumer Reports magazine, commercial baby foods, many of which are made up of condensed fruits and vegetables, can contain high concentrations of pesticide residues. "A lot of these pesticides are toxic to the brain," says Philip Landrigan, a professor

of pediatrics and preventative medicine at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. Citing studies that have linked smaller head circumference and reduced intelligence in babies to in utero exposure to pesticides consumed by their mothers, Landrigan says it is best not to gamble when it comes to baby food.

If you're not already serving organic baby food, CU urges making the switch as soon as possible. A 2005 study ordered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency measured pesticide levels in the urine of

23 children in Washington State before and after a switch to an organic diet. After five straight days on the diet, pesticide measures fell to undetectable levels and remained so until the conventional diets resumed. The study concluded: "An organic diet provides a dramatic and immediate protective effect" against pesticide exposure.

Fortunately for concerned parents, the organic food industry is growing rapidly and one result is the availability of a wide selection of organic baby foods in both natural food stores and mainstream

supermarkets. Some leading jar- and box-based choices come from Gerber, Earth's Best, Homemade Baby and others. And frozen meals from the likes of Happy Baby, Plum Organics, Bobo Baby and other relative upstarts mix good flavor and fresh healthy ingredients with convenience. Using the power of cold temperatures to keep their foods fresh allows these companies to avoid the use of traditional preservatives.

Happy Baby's frozen meals come in

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