

POLICY FORUM

Going Beyond “Thank You for Your Service”

Introduction

Fifty years ago, America ended the draft and moved to an all-volunteer military force. Since then, millions of men and women have enlisted as soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. Together with their families they share experiences that distance them from their fellow citizens as they defend our nation's interests in conflicts large and small. North Carolina is home to legendary installations like Camp Lejeune, Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg), Pope Airfield, and Air Station Cherry Point, and the state is home to hundreds of thousands of active-duty personnel and their families, as well as more than 700,000 Veterans and theirs.

The authors and articles in this issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal* describe the service-related injuries and illnesses affecting the men, women, and children of our armed forces. They describe too the patchwork of providers of health care to these populations, ranging from military hospitals and clinics to the vast facilities of the Veterans Health Administration and, increasingly, our neighborhood providers. They ask if within our civilian clinics, emergency departments, and hospitals we are treating these warriors and their families unawares—and if we know how to speak up and respectfully and competently address the trauma, toxic exposures, stressors, and moral injuries they have suffered.

It is incumbent on us to improve the health care provided to the enlisted, the reservist, the Veteran, and to their families. We must work to better identify and address injuries and illnesses obvious and obscure, and perhaps yet unknown, related to their deployments in combat and the duty stations, encampments, and installations where they serve. We need accessible, trained, and aware health care professionals providing timely and informed services to our neighbors who have served. That would be the “thank you” they deserve. NCMJ

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