

Walking Shield/Fort Sam assists local clinics with patient caseloads

SPECIAL HEALTH FEATURE STORY

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By Elizabeth I. Beaumont
Fort Belknap News

Here is a little background on the group of Soldiers involved in Walking Shield/7210th IMSU, Fort Sam Houston, a small detachment unit out of San Antonio, TX at Fort Sam Houston Military Base.

In ten working days, this medical support unit provided medical and dental support in an efficient, compassionate, friendly and respectful manner during their detailed assignment to the Hays Eagle Child Indian Health Service and the Fort Belknap Agency Indian Health Service.

"We are one of 10 Innovative Readiness Programs (IRT) that are providing care on Indian Reservations, with 32 Soldiers who served at Fort Belknap," CPT Shante Wells said. "We are split between the Agency Health Center and Hays Clinic. Our numbers include a Dentist, Optometrist, Family Practice Physician, PA, 2 RNs, 4 Admin, 2 Lab techs, with the rest being Dental techs and Medics. Myself (CPT Wells) and MSG Paulette Turner are Officer and NCO In Charge of this mission.

The 7210th (Walking Shield) have seen quite a few patients, but the dental teams have been the busiest revealing the extreme need for dental care in the area.

The group arrived on July 10, 2010 and completed their mission on July 24, 2010. This assignment comes from USARC (US Army Reserve Command) as part of their Innovative Readiness Training projects.

"There are different missions under the IRT every year, but as mentioned before, this is one of 10 Indian Reservation missions being conducted for this fiscal year," CPT Wells said. "The 7210th MSU provides this type of service every year, whether it be for other military installations or civilian programs. We've had a great experience here at Belknap, with the warmest reception



Photo by Elizabeth Beaumont

One of the Dental Hygienist Arthur with a local girl during the medical support unit's time in Fort Belknap.

from the Tribes and Indian Health Service. We have had an opportunity to experience the Lodge Pole Powwow with an honor dance for us. A few of the Soldiers were also introduced to a Traditional Native American Sweat Lodge Ceremony in Lodge Pole, and others have seen the tourist attractions here in North Central Montana.

Locals who called in for appointments



Photo by Pat Bear

Medical Service Unit at ease on the Wasay Wakpa Wachi dance grounds.

were seen in an efficient friendly manner and had good comments about Walking Shield/



Courtesy Photo

CPT Shante Wells pictured at the Fort Belknap I.H.S. Clinic in July 2010.

Fort Sam.

"The people from Walking Shield were so helpful to us..."

"We are so appreciative of their efforts."

"We really hated to see them go."

These were some of the comments made by the locals who received their medical and dental services during the last couple of weeks. The MSU soldiers saw a lot of walk-ins every day...

In Optometry, they assisted the Indian Health Service's Optometrist Dr. Greg Smith whose office is at the agency clinic.

In Dr. Hauffman's agency dental office, Walking Shield was able to provide 84 cleanings and 64 assists to the dentist who has faithfully provided efficient service to Fort Belknap patients for 30 years and will retire in December, according to officials. Dr. Hauffman is a Navy Veteran and runs a tight ship and has to turn away some people to serve the ones he can every day at Walk-In Dental Clinic.

The medical clinic was assisted with 92 patients who received walk-in care, 15 EMS patients in the Emergency Room participating with 5 ambulance runs. The unit also worked on their own medical charts in medical records and assisted the people in property and supply.

It was out at the Hays Dental Clinic, with reputed Dr. Anita Masaitis that saw the largest caseload of patients. In 10 days, the unit completed 311 cleanings and 132 exams. More than 150 of these cleanings were done the first week, of which, more than 70 were operative patients.

"We've known that there was a big need for dental care over here and we were able to help with that during our detail here," SSG

Delatorre said. "Our more severe cases were multiple extractions due to no care. There is a waiting list out here in Hays for dental care. In the last two weeks, we also were able to help with some education and referrals."

The dental hygienists spent a busy time focusing on cleaning, sealants and encouraging the young patients to get an early start on good dental care with patients as young as 12 months old to elders needing denture repairs.

Parents noted that their children seemed interested in brushing their teeth with their new toothbrushes later the next week.

"My experience has been awesome here. I've talked to my Soldiers, they say that it has been the best experience,"

SSG Delatorre said. "It's been awesome to be taken in by the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine people here. They are very grateful for the services we have been able to provide them. It's been positive... very busy."

One of the Soldiers, SGT Gary Basurto, was able to make wax trays right on-site for teeth grinding, which he said is from stress.

"We realize that they only have one dentist here, but realistically, they need three," Basurto said. "The Indian Health Service need for dental care is exceptional, but the service is limited. The demand is too great for only two dentists, we have seen this firsthand. It is nobody's fault at this level, but somewhere, someone within the Indian Health Service Administration - somewhere along the way - has to push for more dental funding for these clinics."

During their first weekend in Hays, the Soldiers went to the Lodge Pole Traditional Pow-wow where they received a warm welcome, sharing a traditional dance with the people.

"The people here are lovely. They are so appreciative of what we can provide for them," the SSG Delatorre said.



Photo by Pat Bear

Walking Shield/Fort Sam Soldiers dancing with Peter Big Stone at the Lodge Pole Summer Pow-wow July 16-17.

"Going to the pow-wow was a memorable experience for all of us. Some of us were even invited to participate in a sweat lodge ceremony."

In addition to dental exams in the Hays clinic... there were also soldiers assigned to lab, emergency medical services, supply, medical records as well with their walk-in clinic which was assisted with the handling of 115 doctor's visits.

Locals were in awe of the Soldiers who efficiently provided medical and dental service to them, bestowing gifts to the visitors.

For many, it was an honor to meet these men and women, who in such a brief time here on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, touched the lives of so many with their benevolent service to the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre people of the Little Rockie's.

(Editor's Note: The majority of this article was made possible by a report given to the public about what took place by CPT Wells and interviews with LT.C. Orlandi and Dr. Hicks. Thank-you.)



Courtesy Photo

LT. C. Orlandi and Dr. Hicks, and MSU Dentist operating on a patient in the Dental Health Clinic in Hays, Mont. in July 2010.



Courtesy Photo

Walking Shield/Fort Sam assisting in Emergency Medical Services at the Fort Belknap I.H.S. Clinic's Emergency Room.