



DEFENSE SUICIDE PREVENTION OFFICE

Defense Suicide Prevention Office Video Transcript

Fireside Chat: Integrated Prevention

Published on August 30, 2024

Dr. Liz Clark:

Hi. Thanks so much for joining me for Fireside Chat with the director of a newly formed office called the Office of Command, Climate and Well-Being Integration, or OCCWI, with Dr. Andra Tharp. Dr. Tharp most recently served as a highly qualified expert, or an HQE, for the Office of Force Resiliency and the Sexual Assault Prevention Response Office. Prior to that, Dr. Tharp served as an HQE and the senior prevention advisor for the Air Force Integrated Resilience Office, where she led the development of the Integrated Primary Prevention across the Air Force and now has brought that to the Departmental level. Dr. Tharp also worked in the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC. She has over 80 publications in the areas of trauma and violence and, has made numerous presentations at international, National, state, and local conferences or meetings, and has received many awards for her work in violence prevention. When I think of violence prevention, there is not a better expert than Dr. Andra Tharp, and I am beyond honored and privileged to be able to speak with you today, Dr. Tharp, to discuss integrated prevention, specifically with the newly formed OCCWI office. And so with that, we'll just provide it over to you for a quick little introduction.

Dr. Tharp:

Great. Thank you, and thanks so much for having me here. I'm really excited about the work that we've been doing over the past several years in terms of bringing together different forms of harmful behaviors and having a unified approach to prevention, and excited about our expansion, going further upstream to well-being and quality of life. So, I look forward to talking with you today more about that.

Dr. Clark:

When we think about suicide prevention, and then you, specifically when we look at how to not just focus in on death but making life worth living. And we talked about OCCWI, and if you could talk about the role OCCWI plays and then how that helps within the prevention spectra.

Dr. Tharp:

Sure. So, the Office of Command Climate and Well-Being Integration is going to extend the integrated primary prevention work that we've been undertaking over the past several years, and we're going to do this, like I said, by going even further upstream to incorporate factors that contribute to quality of life and well-being, all of that into a unified effort. So, we'll do this through strategy, policy research, and data analytics to provide the Department with a common operating picture and actionable tools for the well-being of the military community.

The Total Force fitness framework that's going to be new to our office. It's going to serve as the basis for this expansion. And so OCCWI will serve as an integrator across these different efforts, connecting





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the dots, if you will, on how factors like housing, financial readiness, sleep, and command climate are mutually reinforcing and necessary for the well-being and prevention of harmful behaviors.

Dr. Clark:

If you could talk to our audience a little bit about what is integrated primary prevention and how is the DoD using this in our strategy?

Dr. Tharp:

Sure. So, integrated prevention recognizes that harmful behaviors don't occur in isolation and oftentimes the same factors or conditions increase or decrease the potential for multiple harmful behaviors to occur. So, for example, substance misuse is a shared risk factor for multiple harmful behaviors. And healthy command climates and healthy relationships are shared protective factors to prevent multiple harmful behaviors.

So, DoD is really embracing this approach to have a more holistic, coordinated, and comprehensive approach to prevention, both to increase the effectiveness and the efficiency of our work. So, integrated primary prevention, though it's not a new silo or a new program, but rather it's an integrating function that's intended to knit together the multiple resources and tools for a unity of effort in support of Service members, DoD civilian employees, and their families.

Dr. Clark:

I mean, I think it's so powerful when you're talking about that because when we look about we, you know, in our field, we talk about upstream prevention efforts, and when we think about something that's also that's going to prevent suicide, may also prevent a lot of other violent and harmful behaviors. And so, with that, could you talk a little bit about one common misconception about primary prevention?

Dr. Tharp:

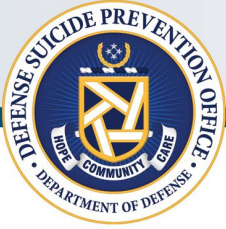
Sure. So, people often believe that prevention is all about focusing on the negative and stopping unhealthy behaviors rather than building on strengths and creating healthy environments where individuals, families, and units can thrive. So, the reality is, it's both. That as a Department, we take a strength-based approach to prevention that builds skills for individuals, empowers and equips leaders to foster healthy command climates, and enhances factors and conditions in the military community that promote safety and quality of life.

So, while we do want to see harmful behaviors decrease, we know the best way to achieve this is building protective factors across contexts while at the same time identifying and targeting those risk factors.

Dr. Clark:

When we think about the research that you all have done and externally as well, what do you, what do you see as the most common obstacles Service members face in maintaining optimal well-being?





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Dr. Tharp:

Yeah. So, looking at data from command climate assessments, one of the most consistent risk factors is moderate to high stress. Now, we know that stress is often part of the work that we do in DoD. So, enhancing well-being is not about eliminating stress altogether, but it's really about identifying when stress is extreme or prolonged; that's when we start to see unhealthy coping kick in.

So, any approach to well-being promotion must take into account factors that may be contributing to high levels of service. Member stress tools for Service members to mitigate the impact of stress and tools to equip leaders both to identify and address both of the sources of unnecessary stress that they can affect, knowing that many of these environments are inherently stressful. So, that will help them really recognize the signs of stress in their units.

Dr. Clark:

And so I think some of the things that you've talked about through each one of our opportunity today to talk through, what your office is doing is climate and, so what role does climate play in well-being?

Dr. Tharp:

So, individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors can contribute to or detract from well-being and command climate describes a set of interpersonal factors, such as cohesion and morale, and leadership driven factors, such as transformational leadership that establish unit norms, that reinforce healthy decision making.

So, well-being is challenged when command climate does not reinforce healthy decision-making or even tolerate harmful behaviors. So, although well-being is multifaceted and multiple individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors contribute to it, command climate is one area that all leaders can influence, and as a result, it's been a central focus of our work in this area.

Dr. Clark:

Dr. Tharp, again, honored, privileged to be able to have some time with you today. I mean, I think we're extremely excited to see this office now formed and to really provide those supports and resources down at the unit and installation level and just thank you for what you do day in and day out. Thank you for strengthening our system to make life worth living.

And for those of you listening, if you're concerned about somebody who is in crisis, please do dial 988. Press one for the Veterans and Military crisis line. You can also access the crisis line by texting 838255. And with that, Dr. Tharp, thanks so much for being with us today. We appreciate you.

Dr. Tharp:

Thank you. It was my pleasure.

