Throughout her 15-year career in the Navy, Intelligence Specialist Chief Amber Nuanez has been a constant source of support and mentorship to her Sailors. Above all of her accomplishments, she’s most proud to have contributed to others’ growth and development. Of course, her passion and dedication to her career has not come without sacrifice; particularly when it comes to being able to spend time with her young children despite long hours and deployments. In the Keep What You’ve Earned (KWYE) campaign’s newest testimonial public service announcement (PSA), Nuanez admits feeling like she’s “struggled at times being a part-time mom and part-time chief.” But it’s her commitment to her children and her Sailors that contributed to her finding the courage to seek help when she realized she was struggling with her mental and behavioral health.

Nuanez was concerned about how reaching out for help could affect her security clearance and ability to maintain her career in the intelligence community. Yet, she pressed forward recognizing that she was the one that now needed support and that help was always available. Nuanez not only sought help for mental health concerns, but a few months later self-referred for alcohol misuse treatment. She got the support she needed, enabling her to be an even stronger source of inspiration for her kids and Sailors. She now serves as both a Drug and Alcohol Program Advisor (DAPA) and Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC) for her current command.

Addressing mental and behavioral health needs is essential to maintaining personal and mission readiness, and your ability to be there for others. However, concerns about career implications may lead to apprehension about seeking help. There are DoD-level policy protections in place to help prevent negative career impacts for those who proactively seek help. In fact, less than one percent of security clearance denials or revocations involve mental health concerns or behavioral health support. Whether through your local Fleet & Family Support Center (FFSC), Navy chaplain or medical provider, Military OneSource non-medical counseling or the many other resources available to Sailors and families, seeking help is a sign of strength. Further, it’s an indicator of the good judgment and reliability needed to maintain a security clearance.

The process of proactively seeking help for alcohol use issues in the Navy is called self-referral. If done before an alcohol incident (AI) has occurred, self-referring for treatment through your command does not result in disciplinary action. Initiating a self-referral means that a Sailor wants to receive counseling or treatment for alcohol abuse. “That treatment was really awesome because they focus on the ‘why’ of your drinking habits,” Nuanez shared. “If I didn’t have the [self-referral] program...I don’t know where I’d be.”

To initiate a self-referral and begin your journey to recovery, speak with a qualified agent, such as your command DAPA; commanding officer, executive officer, officer-in-charge, command master chief or chief of the boat; Navy drug and alcohol counselor or intern; DOD medical provider (including a Licensed Independent Provider); chaplain or FFSC counselor.

1 Small ACT can make a career or life-saving difference. Seeking help is the best thing you can do for yourself, your family and your career if navigating mental or behavioral health concerns.

Encourage others to reach out for support by sharing this article and ISC Nuanez’s video, which will be available on KWYE’s YouTube channel this month. To access additional responsible drinking tools and learn more about the self-referral process, visit https://go.usa.gov/xPKzq or download the Pier Pressure mobile app. Additionally, share the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign’s posters on seeking help and security clearances, available at https://go.usa.gov/xPKzT.
Lifelink Spotlight

Using Art Therapy to Improve Psychological Health

Engagement with the arts is an increasingly popular means of promoting healing and psychological well-being. Whether through music, dance or arts and crafts, participation in some form of artistic expression provides an outlet to creatively channel emotions and can be a great mindfulness tool.

Art therapy is a modality provided by masters-level clinicians who facilitate the process of artistic creation for their patients and incorporate psychological theory in the therapeutic process. This allows patients to build self-awareness, improve resilience and better manage their emotional responses. For some patients, verbally communicating their psychological health concerns is difficult and traumatic, but participating in art therapy with a trained clinician allows patients to express their thoughts and convey their concerns in a less challenging and more creative way.

Small studies on the effects of creative visual art therapies have shown potential benefits. A small 2002 pilot study found that art therapy can decrease feelings of depression and anxiety in Vietnam veterans, and a 2000 study of three traumatic brain injury (TBI) patients found that it helped the participating patients improve their levels of attention, concentration and memory.

For individuals with past or current suicidal ideation, art therapists use their training to help patients develop and explore coping mechanisms when dealing with suicidal thoughts and learn to implement strategies that promote safety and reduce the risk of self-harm.

At Navy Medicine East (NME), Sailors, Marines and other staff participated in an art therapy session on September 19 in observation of Suicide Prevention Month. NME remains committed to preventing suicide and increasing wellness among Navy and Marine, their families, and beneficiaries throughout the year.

Plan of the Week Notes

Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of October:

1. The crisp autumn weather may cause much of your summertime self-care to “fall” by the wayside, but now is a great time to discover new practices and develop more seasonally tuned self-care routines. Find inspiration from fellow Sailors at https://navstress.wordpress.com/2017/10/19/fall-into-healthy-stress-navigation-with-sailors-on-the-street/.

2. Proper sleep can improve psychological health. Make sure your sleep space is dark, cool and comfortable, and utilize white noise to help you sleep peacefully. Avoid eating and having alcohol or caffeine too soon before bed as they can cause unrestful sleep. Stay away from mobile devices, television or computers before bed to get your mind into sleep mode. And exercise during the day to positively impact your sleep pattern. Incorporate these practices to help optimize your sleep this fall!

3. Sailors may feel apprehensive about reaching out for help for mental health concerns out of fear of impacts to security clearance eligibility; however, seeking help demonstrates responsibility and good judgment needed to obtain or maintain a clearance. In fact, less than one percent of security clearance denials or revocations involve mental health concerns or treatment. Learn more from https://navstress.wordpress.com/2018/09/07/security-clearances-and-mental-health-part-1-judgment-matters/.

4. Psychological health concerns and crises deserve just as much attention as physical health concerns, illness or disease. Seeking help is the best thing a Sailor can do to protect their health and career. There is 24/7 support available from the Military Crisis Line online at www.militarycrisisline.net; by phone at 1-800-273-8255, press 1; or via text at 838255.

New Suicide Prevention Instruction

OPNAVINST 1720.4B was signed detailing Navy Suicide Prevention Program policy and procedural updates. This instruction highlights requirements of the Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL) Program, updated guidance on the Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER), requirements for suicide prevention program managers (SPPM) at echelon 2 and 3 commands, explains suicide prevention coordinator (SPC) roles and responsibilities, and provides guidance on reducing access to lethal means. The updated instruction can be accessed at www.suicide.navy.mil.
Boosting Your Energy without Misusing Rx Stimulants

While strong coffee or energy drinks (which carry their own risks) are popular quick-fixes among Sailors to boost energy and alertness, there may be temptation to use prescription stimulants to strengthen performance on the job. This can put Sailors’ health and careers at risk, especially if taking someone else’s medication.

Prescription medications such as Adderall (Dextroamphetamine-Amphetamine) and Ritalin (Methylphenidate) are used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a condition causing chronic inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsive behaviors. In some cases, they are also used to treat narcolepsy, a condition marked by intense daytime drowsiness. These medications are central nervous system stimulants that affect certain chemicals in the brain. For people who have ADHD or narcolepsy, these medications are very effective in the treatment of their symptoms and can help them gain the attentiveness and alertness that they need to function in their daily lives.

Because of stimulants’ ability to alleviate inattentiveness and sleepiness in people with ADHD or narcolepsy, some people who do not have diagnosed conditions feel that these medications may create positive results for them. However, a small study of college students co-conducted by the University of Rhode Island and Brown University found that these medications are not helpful to people who do not have ADHD. While they may provide temporary improvement of mood and focus, they do not appear to improve performance or reading comprehension, and they can impair short-term memory. Additionally, if not under the supervision of a doctor, an individual taking prescription stimulants that they have not been prescribed could be at risk of potentially harmful side effects such as heart problems, increased blood pressure or stroke.

When your watchstanding duty makes you feel like taping your eyelids open, getting these sorts of medications from a friend, family member or shipmate may seem like a good option. But sharing prescription medications can potentially threaten your Navy career. Try these tips to safely work towards becoming more attentive, alert and productive:

Optimize your sleep. Getting seven to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep contributes to better memory, mood and performance. If that sort of sleep schedule is out of reach for you, squeezing in 30-minute or two-hour naps can alleviate fatigue and get you on track. Caffeine may be a helpful energy booster but remember to avoid it during the latter half of your day, as it can prevent restful sleep. A helpful tip for watchstanding is following a 3/9 watchbill. This includes three-hour watches with nine hours off between watches. Ask your supervisor about following this schedule that maximizes performance and allows for adequate rest.

Focus on the tasks that matter and give yourself breaks. Instead of creating your to-do list with every single one of your tasks in mind, identify what is especially pressing for the day and focus on completing those (with breaks!). Overworking the brain can make productivity even more challenging, frustrating and tiring.

Complete your most challenging work before lunch. Find yourself feeling sluggish after eating lunch? Try working on your more difficult tasks before your break when the mind is still fresh and you’re able to put forth your best energy. Save the “busy work” that doesn’t require as much creativity or brain power for later.

Other ways to boost energy and alertness include establishing a mindful morning routine that includes time for exercise or other activity and eating a balanced diet consisting of whole foods over processed foods.

When used as a quick fix for your energy or productivity deficit, prescription stimulants can threaten your health and career. Implementing these tips into your daily routine can help you boost your energy and your performance naturally. For more tips to use prescription drugs safely, visit the Prescription for Discharge campaign at https://go.usa.gov/xPkqG.