OES 2016 Project Abstract

Agency Objective. Increase the awareness and utilization of Virtual PEER Forums and online resources for military caregivers using an email that directs mailing-list subscribers to an interactive web-based activity.

Background. Virtual PEER (Personalized Experiences, Education, and Resources) Forums provide an opportunity for those caring for ill and wounded service members to meet remotely with their peers in real time to provide and receive input in the form of knowledge and resource sharing, as well as socioemotional support. The Offices of Military Community and Family Policy and Warrior Care Policy sought to increase awareness and utilization of Virtual PEER Forums by those who are eligible to participate, along with increasing general awareness of the online resources available to this population.

Methods. The Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Warrior Care Policy (WCP) worked with OES to explore improvements to existing communication about monthly Virtual PEER Forums for military caregivers. The team designed an activity for engaging blog subscribers in the PEER Forums.

In collaboration with WCP, OES designed two primary changes to the existing outreach strategy. First, the team used language (in both the subject line and email body) that emphasized caregivers *receiving* support from their peers versus *giving* support to their peers. All individuals who self-subscribed to an email mailing list maintained by WCP received one of two versions of the email, emphasizing either receiving or giving support.

In addition, OES designed an interactive web-based activity to encourage individuals to more actively engage after clicking on a link in the email. This link directed individuals to a short (2 minute) web activity where they were able to self-assess their knowledge of the resources provided by WCP.[55]

Results. The test was conducted in July 2016. Among the group receiving emails emphasizing the *receipt* of support, 5,927 emails were delivered, leading to a 16.4 percent unique open rate and a 2.4 percent click-through rate to the web-based activity. Among the group receiving emails emphasizing *giving* support, 5,926 emails were delivered with a 15.3 percent unique open rate and a 1.9 percent click-through rate, a difference of 1.1 percent (p=0.1, 95% CI = [-0.20, 2.43]), and 0.5 percent (p=0.05, 95% CI = [0.00, 1.04]) respectively.[56]

Forty-seven percent of individuals who began the web-based activity completed it, and five new caregivers signed up for the July forum—three from the group who received emails emphasizing *giving* support and two from the group who received emails emphasizing *receiving* support. In addition, during the three-day period directly after the emails were sent, WCP reports that the daily views to the Caregiver Resource webpage increased by 70 percent relative to the average daily views in 2016 to date.

Conclusions. The test comparing *receiving* and *giving* language suggested that highlighting the benefits to subscribers increased email open rates, though not click-through rates.

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[55] No information was collected during this web activity.
[56] All open and click-through data was collected within two days of sending, so the rates reported here represent short-term responses.