

My mama wears combat boots!

Fort Drum offers wealth of resources for pregnant soldiers

By Pvt. Antonietta Rico
Staff Writer

"I was shocked and scared," said Pfc. Laine Lane, describing her reaction after she found out she was pregnant. A supply specialist with 1-10th Aviation and now a mother of 5-month old baby, Lane said she was scared because she was far from home and she would have to face her pregnancy alone.

But the fact is that she was not alone. At any one time, about nine percent of the female force in the Army is pregnant. These soldiers are faced with choices that will affect the rest of their lives. Whether single or married, a pregnant soldier will have to decide if she will remain in the Army. She must also face the challenges having a baby will present in her military career - from a drop in her physical training scores to dealing with maternity care while trying to be a reliable part of her unit. What exactly should an active duty soldier expect when she is expecting at Fort Drum?



Courtesy

As soon as a soldier suspects she is pregnant she should go to the Conner Troop Memorial Clinic or the Guthrie Ambulatory Health Care Clinic laboratory and have a pregnancy test done, said Lt Col. Leslie S. Rendeiro, chief of Fort Drum's satellite Ob/Gyn Clinic at Guthrie and a nurse-midwife.

Following a positive test result, a soldier will pick up a pregnancy profile from the CTMC and free prenatal vitamins from the pharmacy at Guthrie. While at Guthrie, soldiers will need to make an appointment for an Ob/Gyn Orientation class that is held every week, Rendeiro said.

The orientation is meant to familiarize soldiers with the Ob/Gyn Clinic and all the paperwork that needs to be filled out. At the orientation, the soldier will receive an appointment with a nurse-midwife for her first physical exam.

"All pregnant soldiers are taken care of at Guthrie or the Watertown Medical Building," Rendeiro said.

Fort Drum's Ob/Gyn Clinic is located in the Watertown Medical Building, which is adjacent to Samaritan Medical Center on Washington Street.



The Ob/Gyn Clinic has three doctors, three nurse-midwives and nine support staff members who divide their time between the Watertown clinic and Guthrie. A soldier can choose between having her appointments in Watertown or on post.

If she feels more comfortable with anyone doctor or nurse-midwife, a soldier may request to see that provider throughout her pregnancy, and they will try to accommodate her needs, Rendeiro said.

"My door is always open. I'm very receptive, and I will listen to what the woman or couple has to say," she said.

"The whole idea is to create an environment where people feel (well received), they feel welcomed, and they feel warmed..." Rendeiro said.

Another important step in the soldier's pregnancy is to enroll in the Pregnancy Physical Training (PGPT) Program.

Fort Drum offers a post-wide organized PT program for pregnant soldiers. The PGPT is specifically designed to work with the soldier's pregnancy. It is based on and follows guidelines set down by the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, said Capt Sarah Harrison, who holds a master's of science degree in physical therapy and is in charge of the program.

PT is conducted at the Pine Plains Physical Fitness Center Gym from 7-8 a.m. The soldiers are broken down into four groups: first, second, and third trimester soldiers, and postpartum soldiers. An exercise program is designed based on a soldier's capability to exercise during a specific trimester and after she has her child.

"The main thing we want to do is keep soldiers at a high fitness level... but the major thing is to be safe during their pregnancy," Harrison said. "(We are) making sure that they have safe and healthy deliveries and that they are not doing workouts on their own during the pregnancy that can damage the (baby)."

The program instructors receive training through the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, she said.

As part of the PGPT program, an aquatics PT class is offered once a week along with a class every Tuesday that is run by Community Health Nursing.

By attending the program, soldiers are ensuring that they will be able to get back in shape as soon as possible.

"It is absolutely necessary to make sure that soldiers can go back to doing their jobs. Within six months after delivery they are expected to be at 100 Percent (capacity in their units)..." she said.

Lane credits the program with her physical abilities after her pregnancy.

"After the baby I was still able to do my pushups and sit-ups," she said.

A side benefit of the PT program is that the soldiers can form a bond with the other pregnant soldiers there.

"You get to meet a lot of people, and you find out you are not the only Person in that Situation," Lane said.

As soon as the pregnancy is confirmed, the unit commander will meet with the pregnant soldier for a counseling session. The commander will cover subjects regarding choices a soldier has during her pregnancy. He or she will brief the soldier on retention or separation (AR 635-200, para.8-9), maternity care (AR 40-3, para.4-44), leave (AR 630-5, Ch. 9, section 2) and uniforms (AR 670-1, Ch. 24, section 4) as well as basic allowance for housing available to single soldiers at their seventh month of pregnancy. They will be informed on any future assignments (AR 614-30, para.2-5 and 2-8 and 614-100,614-200, as well as DoD directive 1315.7) and the Pregnancy PT Program.

If a soldier chooses to separate, the Army will still pay for maternity care as long as she sees a military health care provider.

Army Community Service provides various classes free of charge for expectant soldiers. Classes available vary from breastfeeding to childbirth classes. If a soldier feels she needs nutritional guidance during her pregnancy, appointments with a dietician are offered. Child care is available for babies six weeks or older at either the Memorial or Chapel Drive Child Development Centers.

ACS also can provide car seats through the Loan Closet, as well as a gift basket through the Baby Bundles program to new mothers who request them.

Throughout the pregnancy the soldier needs to take good care of the developing baby and her own body. That does not mean that she will ignore her military duties.



There is no reason why a soldier cannot be a productive member of the unit right up to the time of delivery, Renteiro said.

"Pregnancy is not an illness; it is not a disease. It is a condition," Rendeiro said, "...Instead of thinking of the profile limitations as a drawback, it could give soldiers a chance for cross training."

Soldiers should not feel apprehensive about contacting their chain of command and letting them know about their situation.

"I encourage the women to remind their NCOs that they are only pregnant and they still want to be a fully functioning member of their unit within the limitations of their profile," Rendeiro said.

"Always remember, we are soldiers who happen to be women, and women will get pregnant. It is just a fact... Women who are in the military are wanting to serve their country (just) as much as their male counterparts."

Learning about the issues facing pregnant soldiers is one way commanders and NCOs can better support them. Renteiro said she is willing to provide information to leaders who have questions on dealing with a soldier's pregnancy.

"I would encourage all leaders to look at pregnancy as not an illness but just a temporary occurrence in the life of the soldier," she said.

As for the soldiers, there is one piece of advice Renteiro always gives to them.

"Be the best soldier you can be."

"Always remember we are soldiers who happen to be women, and women will get pregnant. It is just a fact... women who are in the military are wanting to serve their country (just) as much as their male counterparts."

**Lt. Col. Leslie 50 Rendeiro, chief of the
Fort Drum Ob/Gyn clinic at Guthrie
Ambulatory Health Care Clinic.**