



Maj. Gen. Gary S. Patton, director of the Department of Defense's sexual assault prevention and response office, left, and Jessica L. Wright, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, right, present Dr. Kimberly "Toni" Korol-Evans with the 2013 Safe Helpline Operator of the Year award Thursday at the Rape, Incest and Abuse National Network in Washington, D.C. Korol-Evans, who works with Department of Defense sexual assault victims, received the award as part of the launch of the Safe HelpRoom for service members and families. (Courtesy photo)

DoD Announces Safe Help Room, Peer Support Chat Sessions for Sexual Assault Victims

By Pablo Villa, NCO Journal

The Department of Defense reiterated its commitment to fighting sexual assault in the military this week during an event to announce the launch of a new peer support service for sexual assault victims.

The Safe HelpRoom, a service of the Safe Helpline, was announced Thursday as a way to let victims connect with one another and give them a support outlet through chats in a secure online environment.

Both the Safe HelpRoom and Safe Helpline are administered by the Department of Defense and operated by the nonprofit organization Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network through a contract with the Department of Defense's sexual assault prevention and response office, known as SAPRO.

"Survivors of sexual assault have told us that being able to discuss their concerns with peers can provide a level of support not available through other means," said

Jessica L. Wright, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. “Safe HelpRoom is a groundbreaking development in the department’s commitment to support military victims of sexual assault.”

The Safe HelpRoom is part of an ongoing effort to stamp out sexual assault from the military.

A report released by the Pentagon earlier this month estimated that 26,000 sexual assault crimes were committed within the U.S. military in 2012. The number represents a 37-percent increase from 2010. The findings have sparked outrage throughout the country and a focused response from military leaders.

Maj. Gen. Gary S. Patton, SAPRO director, said “assessing ourselves” is a priority in combating sexual assault, to ensure that programs and policies work. “SAPRO and RAINN are working together in prevention, investigation, accountability, victim support and assessment,” Patton said.

“We see ourselves as a national leader in sexual assault, its prevention and response,” Patton said. “Part of being a national leader is innovation, and the innovation you see today with the mobile app, the Safe HelpRoom

— the first of its kind with a peer-to-peer, secure venue where victims of sexual assault — can chat in a closely moderated and very professional chat room.”

Safe HelpRoom sessions will last two hours and are available twice a week. The session schedule can be found at <http://SafeHelpline.org>.

When users visit Safe Helpline, the staff provides assistance and offers a variety of service referrals for resources on and off military bases and installations, officials said in a statement announcing Safe HelpRoom’s launch

The referral database also houses information for local civilian and Veterans Affairs Department resources for helpline users seeking information and crisis support away from the military response system, they added.

“Sexual assault is a crime DoD will not tolerate,” Wright said. “Our service members sign up to protect the United States, and they have to feel safe within our ranks. “I know what it’s like to be asked to do risky things, and we don’t want to put our service members at risk as they’re doing (their jobs).

Terri Moon Cronk of the American Forces Press Service contributed to this report. ■



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