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# Military looking for a few good medics

## ... and surgeons, and RNs, and radiologists, too

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Dr. Sudip Bose and medical personnel treat an Iraqi police officer in the Iraqi city of Najaf last year.

By Michael Moran

Senior correspondent

MSNBC

Updated: 7:09 a.m. ET June 10, 2005



Michael Moran

Senior correspondent

NEWARK, N.J. — Sirens wailing, Ed Wheat's ambulance races through the streets of Newark en route to yet another GSW. In Wheat's world, that's shorthand for gun shot wound. Newark is a city

so rough that no one but the state government is willing to take responsibility for emergency medical care. Wheat's crew is often the first on the scene of traumatic accidents, stabbings and gun battles.

This time, the initial report is wrong — not a gun shot victim, just a 300-pound diabetic, former professional boxer whose hypoglycemic state has him flailing at those who have come to his aid.

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Wheat, a 6'4" 250 pounds former military policeman, is the perfect candidate to step in and subdue the man. With several police and firefighters, he moves in and takes a hard punch in the eye before the man is loaded into the ambulance for treatment.



AP

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"It's like that some days," Wheat says, showing off a burgeoning shiner. "It can be quiet sometimes, but a lot of times it's run and gun, and you're fighting to stay focused on your job, almost robotic, instead of thinking about what could happen around you."

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Coolness under pressure and his experience with gun and knife wounds makes the 34-year-old the perfect candidate for another job, one the Army and Marine Corps are more and more desperate to fill these days. A few months ago, Wheat and several of his colleagues here were approached by a Navy recruiter who promised a "tax-free \$120,000 bonus" if they agreed to sign on as medical consultants with a Marine Corps unit in Iraq.

"I knew what they were asking, and don't get me wrong, I was tempted," says Wheat. "That's a lot of money, and I really want to help. But I worried that I wouldn't be accepted by the Marines, as an outsider, and I won't kid you - I thought about getting killed or injured. And I decided. Hey, I'm already doing a job that's dangerous that no one else wants right here. So I said no."

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Luring trained veterans like Ed Wheat back into the medical corps is a full-time headache for the military, which even in peace time is compelled to offer bonuses and perks that would compare with those available in the private sector. These days, with conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the military attempting to add more than 40,000 new soldiers over the next few years, the challenge is more acute than ever.

"What's happening with our combat medics is not so much a recruiting

problem as it is keeping up with the Army's expansion," says Lt. Gen. Kevin Kiley, the Army's surgeon general. "We're standing up entirely new brigades, and that has added to requirements, so we're having to hustle to continue to recruit highly qualified men and women who can make it through courses and get into the field."

**More acute for specialties**

The decline in general Army recruiting in recent months has been precipitous. On Wednesday, for instance, the Army said that it had missed its recruitment goal for May by more than 25 percent – that after lowering its monthly target. It was the fourth month in a row that recruitment fell short. Perhaps more importantly, unlike February and March, which are traditionally slow periods for recruiters, May is usually a busy month as students begin to graduate or anticipate graduation from high school.

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Nightly News

While media reports have focused on the problems the Army and Marine Corps are having with recruitment, the retention of highly trained specialists is as serious, if not more so, for the long-term ability of the military to sustain operations around the globe.

Kiley notes that some 36,000 medical staff – doctors, nurses, technicians — have deployed to southwest Asia from the Army alone in the past four years. That is not only time away from home, but in some cases an interruption of their training as internists or medical students.

The bonuses offered to Wheat and others to work as private consultants are part of a series of strategies designed to bring in highly trained people and to hold on to those already in the service.

"In my experience, in the Army since 1976, it has never been easy to hold on to people who can command high salaries in the outside world," says Kiley. "But today we're also feeding into the larger issue of recruiting for the Army altogether, and we're having some issues of getting our total end strengths up to the maximums. And our ability to offer bonuses is key."

For instance, the Army is currently offering a \$20,000 bonus to those who agree to re-enlist after their first four year tour is up. But that amount can grow depending on the skills involved and the military's need for them.

**CONTINUED: Paging Dr. Dogface**

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