

From Corpsman to Counselor

Story by PA3 Robert Simpson, PADET St. Petersburg, Fla.

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Sore throats, runny noses and heat exhaustion are a few reasons people find their way to the health care facility at Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg's South Moorings, in St. Petersburg. However, some people find themselves there for more serious ailments, such as abuse of drugs and alcohol.

It can be difficult for people with a drug or alcohol problem to find help. Sometimes, a unit's Collateral Duty Addictions Representative (CDAR) can mean the difference between unemployment, failed relationships, legal complications or life and death.

Petty Officer 1st Class Kevin F. Cronin, the CDAR and clinic supervisor for Sector St. Petersburg, was awarded the 2006 Government Employees Insurance Company's (GEICO) Military Service Award April 30, for his contributions to Sector St. Petersburg as the CDAR.

Eligibility for the GEICO Military Service Award includes any enlisted service member who is recognized by their command for their outstanding contributions in any of the categories of drug and alcohol prevention, fire prevention and fire safety, and traffic safety and accident prevention. One service member from each branch of the U.S. armed forces is selected to receive the award.

The CDAR is a member of the unit who advises the unit's command on Coast Guard instructions, such as those in the personnel and the wellness manuals. They provide guidance for the command to make sure they have the information needed to make an informed decision on a person's career or family situation when faced with an alcohol or drug related incident.

"It's challenging to keep myself informed on the effects of new drugs, as well as keeping the service members informed of the dangers of using these substances," said Cronin. "But it's difficult to keep yourself from becoming involved in your own personal opinion of things; especially when you witness the human tragedies of the effects of what substances do to them and their families."



ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. - Petty Officer 1st Class Kevin Cronin displays the Government Employee Insurance Company Military Service Award he received on April 30, for his actions as the collateral duty addictions representative for Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg. Every year GEICO gives the award to one member from each branch of the armed forces for their outstanding contributions in the categories of drug and alcohol prevention, fire prevention and fire safety, and traffic safety and accident prevention. Coast Guard photograph by PA3 Robert Simpson, PADET St. Petersburg.

Cronin establishes unit-training plans for alcohol awareness and conducts semi-annual training for all personnel at his units. He also provides extensive substance-abuse training to the Coast Guard members stationed in his area.



ARLINGTON, Va. - Recipients of the 2007 Government Employees Insurance Company's (GEICO) Military Service Award pose with their wives before the award ceremony. The GEICO Military Service Award is awarded to one service member from each branch of the armed forces for their outstanding contributions in the categories of drug and alcohol prevention, fire prevention and fire safety, and traffic safety and accident prevention. Pictured are, from top left, Air Force Master Sgt. Marshall S. Dellinger II, Army Sgt. 1st Class Marion E. Benson III and Marine Gunnery Sgt. Daniel P. Schismenos. From bottom left, Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Ramil S. Valdez, Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Kevin Cronin and Air Force Senior Airman Brandon E. Hoosier. Photograph courtesy of GEICO.

Cronin is the CDAR for more than 785 Coast Guard members at Sector St. Petersburg, including the crews of four 110-foot Coast Guard cutters, two 87-foot cutters and members at six subordinate Coast Guard units along the west coast of Florida.

“The role of a CDAR is an invaluable asset to the command of a unit, the members of the unit and to the Coast Guard as a whole,” said Capt. Joseph Servidio, commander of Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg.

The unit’s CDAR keeps an open-door policy concerning any service member who chooses to step forward with a problem, called the self-referral program.

The benefit of using the self-referral program is that the command will not retaliate against the service member, or their career, if there have been no prior incidents in that person’s career attributed to drugs or alcohol.

“When a person can recognize themselves that they are heading down the wrong road, self referral can save their life and help their family’s lives,” said Cronin.

“Some people don’t know what kind of trouble their lives are in until it’s too late, but when it’s all said and done, many of them thank me because they had no idea their life was headed down such a dark road.”

One area of special concern is the legal drinking ages in different countries. The Coast Guard travels to many countries with different legal drinking ages, and the command of a unit, as well as the members of the unit, must be informed of the laws and regulations in those countries. Knowing the rules, and exercising good judgment, is the most effective way to avoid an alcohol related incident.

Cronin has been the CDAR for Sector St. Petersburg for more than three years, and during that time he has improved the working relationships with numerous drug and

alcohol intervention professionals in the area, including the counselors at the Life-Skills department at Macdill Air Force Base, in Tampa, Fla., and local chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

“Because of the Coast Guard’s transient nature, our members need to be seen very quickly, sometimes with little or no advance notice to the agencies,” said Cronin. “These agencies are an essential part of our treatment programs here because we need to have doctors, both civilian and military, to sign off and confirm a medical diagnosis to our members.”

Whether it’s a headache or an addiction, the Coast Guard members at Sector St. Petersburg know they can count on Cronin for his dedication, not just as a corpsman, but as a fellow shipmate, standing a constant watch, looking out for the members of his Coast Guard family.

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