

Military brass meet Operation Mend physicians, patients

Corporal Diane Cardile was on duty in Iraq with a group of fellow women marines when a suicide bomber suddenly struck. When smoke from the deadly explosion cleared, only three of the women had survived – Cardile among them, suffering severe facial and hand burns.



Gen. James Amos, 31st assist. commandant of the U.S. Marine Corp., with Corporal Diane Cardile, USMC (Retired). Cardile suffered severe facial and hand burns from a suicide bomb in Iraq, and was Operation Mend's first female patient.

Not long after, Cardile became the first female patient of Operation Mend, a pioneering program that supports American troops by offering specialized reconstructive surgery to military personnel injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recently, she returned to UCLA during a visit by two of the nation's most senior-level military generals.

Gen. James Amos, 31st assistant commandant of the U.S. Marine Corp., and Gen. Pete Chiarelli, 32nd vice chief of staff of the U.S. Army – both of them second in command of their respective branches – visited Reagan UCLA Medical Center and the division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery on Oct. 24. Along with their wives and staff, they learned more about Operation Mend and discussed ways to further expand the program, which is a unique collaboration, supported by private contributions, between UCLA, the V.A. - Greater Los Angeles and the military. The visit included meeting Cardile and two other Operation Mend patients.

"It was encouraging to have such a high level visit and see their support," said Dr. Timothy Miller, professor and chief of plastic surgery and chief surgeon for the program. "We all share the same goal of helping these young people reclaim their lives after suffering such devastating injuries."



(From left) Gen. Pete Chiarelli, 32nd vice chief of staff of the U.S. Army, and Gen. Amos talk with Corporal Aaron Mankin, USMC (Retired).

Operation Mend's first patient, Mankin was burned over 25 percent of his body by an improvised explosive device while serving in Iraq.

"Gen. Amos and Gen. Chiarelli have been tireless in their drive to make sure that injured soldiers get the very best in care, and this program is of personal importance to them," added Amir Rubin, chief operating officer for UCLA Hospital System. "We are so grateful to have these kinds of leaders heading our armed service, and appreciate how much they care for these individuals."

Since the program started in 2007, nine injured military personnel have undergone surgical treatment at UCLA and the V.A.-Greater Los Angeles, and more are on the way.

"We knew Operation Mend was great, but having come here and seen the hospital, met the staff, nurses, doctors, and healthcare professionals – it has just blown us away," said Gen. Amos. "This visit is our opportunity to say 'thank you,' and we are going to come back and be cheerleaders for Operation Mend in the future."

In addition to expanding the program to include more patients and services, hopes are for Operation Mend to become a model to help build more military/civilian collaborations at institutions across the country to address the "other wounds of war," such as traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorders.



(From left) Gen. Pete Chiarelli; Operation Mend patient, USMC Ret. Sgt. Octavio Sanchez; Gen. James Amos; Dr. Timothy Miller, professor and chief of plastic surgery at UCLA; Ret. Corp. Diane Cardile; Ret. Corp. Aaron Mankin; and Dr. Chris Crisera, assistant professor of plastic surgery.

"I think the biggest thing about Operation Mend is the partnering that we have shown we can do between the military medical professionals and the civilian medical professionals," added Gen. Chiarelli. "UCLA and Operation Mend are a testimony to the fact that we want to do our part to help support the troops. We all understand that there is a war on terror, but our piece is healing and mending and we want to contribute to that process. Together we can do wonderful things."

Find more information on [Operation Mend](#). And read a previous [UCLA Today story](#).

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