

UCLA OPERATION MEND TREATS WOUNDED WARRIORS



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LOS ANGELES (KABC) --

Treating war injuries requires special medical care, and one way America's wounded warriors are getting the treatment they need is with UCLA's Operation Mend.

Retired Air Force Staff Sgt. Brian Schiefer handles himself quite well in a wheelchair, but says most of the time, he's in a lot of pain. In 2008, the 31-year-old was training for his third deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan when the Humvee he was riding in flipped over.

"I broke two ribs, cracked my sternum, broke my shoulder, fractured my skull, severed a nerve in my eye, and tore some ligaments in both shoulders," said Schiefer.

Schiefer fractured his spine in four places. He survived numerous close calls and complicated surgeries. But shoulder, back, migraine and nerve pain continue to plague him.

In his home state of Florida, he couldn't get the all-inclusive help he needed. That's when he learned about Operation Mend -- a collaboration between the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center and the military.

"Once the wounded warriors came to UCLA, we started noticing they had other injuries, such as orthopedic injuries, and that's how I got involved," said Dr. Sharon Hame with Operation Mend.

When you have multiple or poly-traumatic injuries, as Schiefer does, it helps to have a comprehensive team made up of doctors from various specialties treating you all at once. Through Operation Mend, families of wounded warriors also get support.

"We get to treat not only them, but their family members as well, and make sure that they're really getting all aspects of their life taken care of," said Hame. "The warriors that we treat are really special and they deserve this care."

Schiefer hopes with the help of Operation Mend, he'll get back to living a full healthy life.

"There is no cure for paralysis, but, you know, it's just the day-to-day stuff, even not dealing with the pain and the nuances that that brings," he said.

Operation Mend used to only accept veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. It now has expanded to accept post-9/11 service members.