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# Evaluation of a Brief Marriage Intervention for Internal Behavioral Health Consultants in Military Primary Care

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# Evaluation of a Brief Marriage Intervention for Internal Behavioral Health Consultants in Military Primary Care

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## Background

- Military couples face significant challenges to their relationships including demanding schedules, multiple deployments, and frequent moves.
- Despite the high costs of chronic marital distress, very few military (or civilian) couples seek marriage therapy.
- The military services and the VA system have implemented collaborative care models in primary care where internal behavioral health consultants are integrated into primary care.
- Integrated primary care can reduce the stigma of behavioral health services and may increase the odds that couples would seek help earlier.
- There are no established couple interventions designed for use in primary care.
- The purpose of this presentation is to describe a program of research focused on adapting and validating The Marriage Checkup (MC) for use in an integrated primary care clinic.

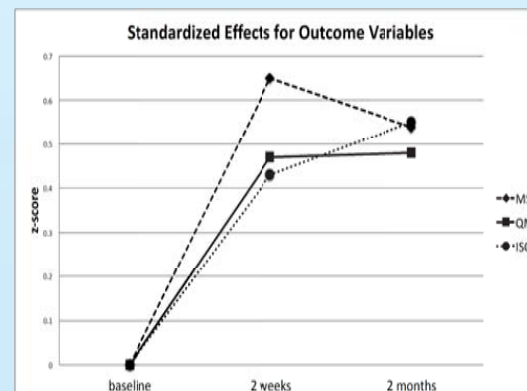
## The Marriage Checkup

- The original MC was created by Dr. James Cordova to be the relationship equivalent of an annual dental or physical health checkup (Cordova et al., 2005).
- The civilian version of MC requires four to five hours to administer. In 2013 we adapted the MC to fit into three 30-minute appointments so that it could fit in the fast-paced environment of primary care.
- Appointment One: Relationship history interview and assessment of couple's perceived strengths
- Appointment Two: Understanding couple's relationship concerns and factors that serve to maintain them.
- Appointment Three: Feedback session to review strengths and concerns and offer a list of individually-tailored options for couple to consider as ways to actively nurture their relationship.
- At the conclusion of the MC couples are provided a hardcopy report that summarizes their results and suggested options for improving their relationship.



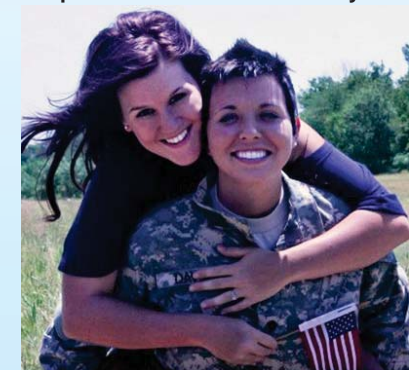
## The Pilot Study

- From 2013 to 2014 we conducted a pilot study of the MC at two military primary care clinics in San Antonio.
- A total of 17 active duty Air Force couples and one individual enrolled in an open trial and completed all three MC appointments.
- Relationship satisfaction ( $B=.54, p=.003, B=.55, p=.004$ ), distress ( $B=.75, p < .001, B=.58, p=.003$ ), and intimacy ( $B=.43, p < .017, B=.47, p=.014$ ) were significantly improved from baseline to 2 weeks post-treatment and at a 2-month follow-up period. Effect sizes were medium to large.



## Ongoing RCT

- Based on our promising pilot study results, in 2015 the DoD awarded us a \$887K grant to conduct a randomized clinical trial of the MC for military primary care.
- Over the next three years the study will randomly assign 250 active-duty couples to either an MC treatment condition to a 7-month waitlist condition.
- The effects of MC on relationship health will be evaluated at 2-month and 6-month follow-up assessments.
- Four Air Force clinics are participating in the RCT:
  - Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center, Lackland AFB, San Antonio
  - 359<sup>th</sup> Medical Operations Squadron, Randolph AFB, San Antonio
  - Malcolm Grow Medical Clinics and Surgery Center, Andrews AFB, Maryland
  - 56<sup>th</sup> Medical Operations Squadron, Luke AFB, Arizona
- The first couple was enrolled in the study in Feb 2016.



## References

- Cordova, J. V., Scott, R. L., Dorian, M., Mirgain, S., Yaeger, D., & Groot, A. (2005). The marriage checkup: A motivational interviewing approach to the promotion of marital health with couples at-risk for relationship deterioration. *Behavior Therapy*, 36, 301-310.