

Fitness experts coach MTIs on fitness fundamentals

By Jose T. Garza III
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A group of fitness experts instructed military training instructors and Reid Clinic providers on basic running and strength fundamentals March 11-13 at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland.

Lt. Col. Dr. Mark Cucuzzella, the chief medical consultant for the Air Force Marathon at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, led three seminars on building movement and endurance, the importance of interval training, building the aerobic system and strategies to reduce injuries March 11 and 12 at the Pflingston Reception Center Auditorium. He also worked with instructors and leaders on posture, mobility, strength and running form.

Kevin Edgerton, 342nd Training Squadron head strength and conditioning coach, and Shawn Dassie, a University of Incarnate Word instructor and a former strength and conditioning trainer for various NFL, NBA and MLB athletes, also provided strength training tips.

The experts conducted a special outdoor run session with Reid Clinic Services providers March 13.

The objective of the seminar was to impart fitness fundamentals to instructors to pass down to trainees in hopes of reducing the amount of injuries occurring in Air Force Basic Military Training.

"We don't want to break our trainees down," said Dr. Nathaniel Nye, a 559th Training Health Squadron medical doctor with a sports medicine fellowship, who coordinated Cucuzzella's visit here. "We want to build them up and make them stronger and teach them the correct movement patterns. We are training our military training instructors and leaders to provide the best physical training coaching to our trainees day in and day out."

Roughly 35,000 trainees go through BMT each year and 12.5 percent of the 67,000 trainees that went through BMT in 2013-2014 were injured, according to recent epidemiology research founded by Nye. Of the 12.5 percent, 20 percent of them did not graduate.

Nye added that 90 percent of those injuries are lower extremity, attributing it to a variety of factors.

"They (trainees) have poor baseline fitness and are not doing a lot of



Photo by Jose T. Garza III

Dr. Mark Cucuzzella (center), the chief medical consultant for the Air Force Marathon at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, demonstrates proper body positioning for running with basic military training leaders and instructors March 12 at the Pflingston Reception Center Auditorium on Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland. Cucuzzella conducted three seminars on basic running and strength fundamentals with BMT leaders and instructors in hopes of reducing injuries in BMT.

running at home and they move their body in ways it shouldn't be moved," Nye said.

"Science has proven that people who run with poor mechanics load their joints and tendons in ways that are not designed to be moved, causing abnormal stressors, breaking down their tendons and joints. Vitamin D deficiency, iron deficiency and poor nutrition are also factors. Poor footwear and bad genes can also be a part of it," Nye said.

Cucuzzella has been aware of injuries occurring in BMT for more than a decade.

"A lot of these injuries are self-inflicted, meaning they are happening under supervised duty time," he noted. "We have to step back and ask if there is a better way we can train people without hurting 20 to 40 percent of them in the process."

Training squadron leaders are ready to do their part in trimming injuries and helping trainees

improve their fitness.

Lt. Col. Paul Burger, 320th Training Squadron commander, said some trainees don't come from physical backgrounds and immediately struggle with fitness after entering BMT.

"If we can help alleviate injuries by coaching them on better running techniques that they can use past the eight weeks they are here in BMT, that would be great," Burger said. "Helping them have a positive mindset and not focusing on mental errors can hopefully encourage them to improve."

Master Sgt. Leslie Masson, 326th TRS MTI, also wants to encourage positive thinking in the process.

"Sometimes they say they can't do certain exercises and we have to try and turn it around for them to think more positively about their fitness," she explained.

Staff Sgt. Jared Galloway, 323rd TRS MTI, is also on board to assist trainees in improving their fitness and en-

couraging them to think with a positive mindset.

"I am going to focus on helping trainees with their alignment as far as posture," he noted. "When I see them doing something wrong, I am going to give them tips on how to perform better. If I can teach them the proper way of running while letting them know it is okay to slow down, I think that will be beneficial."

Nye estimated that the Air Force can save an estimated \$4 million in medical costs in two years if the amount of injuries occurring in BMT is reduced by 10 percent.

He hopes to coordinate training seminars every six months, and invite Cucuzzella to return to JBSA-Lackland to conduct another seminar.

"BMT is the place we have to start to make an impact," Cucuzzella said. "We have to teach the trainees early instead of treating symptoms (from injuries) later on."