

## Program helps families of veterans

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The Tulane University Department of Psychiatry is waging war on mental health problems that plague soldiers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Fortify the Family program looks to help the families of veterans who are suffering or are in need of mental health services as a result of their loved one's post-deployment struggles.



Psychologists Frederic Sautter and Julia Cretu have developed the Fortify the Family program, which helps the families of veterans who are suffering or in need as a result of their loved ones' post-traumatic stress disorder. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

While 20 to 30 percent of veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems, often there is a spillover effect, impacting anyone personally involved with the veteran including spouses, parents and children, says Frederic Sautter, clinical professor of [psychiatry and behavioral sciences](#).

“The soldier's relationship with his partner and children are adversely affected by post-traumatic stress, often leading to serious mental health problems in 30 percent of family members,” says Sautter, who serves as the leader of the Family Mental Health Program for the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System.

“Fortify the Family provides family treatment that cannot be provided at the V.A., which focuses primarily on the treatment of the veteran,” Sautter says.

While working on a clinical trial funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Sautter realized that many of his patients were most concerned about their partners and children. Their questions centered on improving parenting skills and getting help for their children for problems that extend beyond the veteran.

Sautter and his colleague, Julia Cretu, clinical instructor of psychiatry, joined together to develop Fortify the Family to offer resources and assistance to families of veterans that were not currently available in the community.

Cretu and Sautter are working with several veterans groups ? the American Legion, Wounded Warriors and Veterans of Foreign Wars ? to extend their outreach efforts and offer support to more families in need throughout southeast Louisiana. For more information, call 504-988-2722.