Return to Duty Rate of Amputee Soldiers in the Current Conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq

Presenting:

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Summary:
During the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, there were 395 major limb amputations between 1 Oct 2001 and 1 June 2006. Of those amputee soldiers, 16.5% have returned to active duty. This is significantly higher than previous return to duty rates following amputation, reported to be 2.3% during the First Gulf War, which is attributed to the establishment of centralized centers for amputee care.

Abstract

Objectives:
The purpose of this study is to determine the percentage of amputee soldiers who sustained their injury during the current conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq that have returned to active duty. In addition, the authors hope to identify factors that influence the amputee’s likelihood to return to active duty.

Methods:
The computerized records of soldiers who presented to the Physical Evaluation Board between 1 October 2001 and 1 June 2006 were reviewed. From this database the following variables were extracted for analysis: age, gender, pay grade, amputation level, and final disposition. Amputation levels were consolidated into the following categories: multiple, above elbow, below elbow, hand, above knee, below knee, and foot. Pay grades were grouped into three categories: E1-E4, E5-E9 and W1-08. Three final dispositions after a Physical Evaluation Board allow the soldier to remain on active duty: fit for duty, return to duty, and continue of active duty.
Results:
During the period reviewed, there were 448 amputations. Fifty-three patients were excluded from the study, 9 amputees were deceased at the time of data collection, an additional 14 had either a partial foot (9) or a partial hand (5) amputation, and 30 amputees still had not completed a physical evaluation board. The remaining 395 major limb amputations were included within this study. Of those, 65 (16.5%) amputees remained on active duty. There were also several additional key results. First, officers and senior enlisted personnel return to duty at a significantly higher rate (35.3% and 25.5% respectively) when compared to junior enlisted personnel (7.0%), p

Conclusion:
After the First Gulf War, 11 of 469 amputees returned to active duty (2.3%). When compared to the previous conflict, the number of amputees returning to duty has increased significantly to over 16%. With the advent of centralized amputee centers providing specialized care and modern prosthetics, amputee soldiers are afforded the opportunity to rehabilitate in an environment that is specifically tailored to meet their individual needs. As a result, more amputee soldiers are returning to active duty.