

Garb Recognized for Trainee Mental Health Screening

May 04, 2011



APS Fellow and Program Committee Member Howard Garb, recipient of the Meritorious Civilian Service Award

APS Fellow Howard Garb was awarded the Meritorious Civilian Service Award on Feb. 24, 2011, in recognition of his contributions to mental health screening in basic military training. Garb is director of the Biographical Evaluation and Screening of Troops Program and chief of the Psychology Research Service, 559th Aerospace Medicine Squadron, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

The Meritorious Civilian Service Award is one of the two highest awards and medals for civilian employees. The award recognizes Air Force employees who have performed their assigned duties in an exemplary manner, with a reasonable degree of command-wide mission impact.

Garb evaluated the method used for screening the mental health of trainees. “The [current] method was valid but I thought we could do better,” he said. “Suicide is a real concern right now in the military and we are trying to prevent that.”

Garb developed the Lackland Behavioral Questionnaire, or LBQ, designed to identify trainees who are suicidal or who otherwise urgently need mental health treatment. The LBQ also serves as a baseline measure for psychological functioning allowing leadership to better understand the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of Air Force enlisted personnel.

In 2006, the National Research Council issued a report criticizing screening procedures that were being used by the U.S. military, and acknowledging the difficulty of conducting systematic research in this area.

Subsequently, Garb has directed the largest study on military mental health screening ever conducted, following 90,000 active duty enlisted personnel over a four-year period. His work is the first to

demonstrate the value of large scale mental health screening in the military. It is considered to be a model for improving mental health screening at military enlistment processing stations.

“Developing the LBQ was difficult,” said Garb. “But, in the end, I appreciate having my work and the work of our program and task force recognized.” He was pleased and surprised to hear he was receiving the award. “My flight commander told me I won, but I didn’t actually believe it ‘til they presented it to me.” æ