

First-class care for amputees

Walter Reed's state-of-the-art center to open next year

By Kelly Kennedy
STAFF WRITER

Making his way through Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Maj. David Rozelle made a mental list of things that could be better.

"I represent the end user," said Rozelle, a hint of a limp showing beneath sharply creased Class A's as he walked. "I know what the amputees need."

In April 2003, an anti-tank mine destroyed Rozelle's right foot. He's using that experience to help design a new amputee center at Walter Reed, where he serves as the administrative officer at the existing Amputee Care Center.

Rozelle expects the new center to be done by next September. About 500 service members

have lost limbs in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — too many for the old center at Walter Reed to handle, Rozelle said.

Walter Reed Army Medical Center is due to close in 2011, when a new medical center is scheduled to open in Bethesda. The new amputee center will fill in until then.

"Even if they have Bethesda up and running by 2011, that's still four years of use," Rozelle said.

The Army plans to spend \$10 million on the new center, which will include offices, room for physical therapy and areas where the soldiers and their families can take a break. It also will feature an indoor track, a climbing wall, a virtual reality center to practice walking, a media center for family members, a prosthetics center, a

robotics research center and a gait analysis room.

"We really tied some neat stuff into this," Rozelle said, grinning over the blueprints stretched out on the table in front of him.

Finding, fixing problems

After being wounded in Iraq, Rozelle had been flying to Walter Reed from Fort Carson, Colo., once a month to volunteer as a peer mentor to the other amputees.

Then, he returned to Iraq for a year with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

"On one last visit before Iraq, I looked at Chuck [Scoville, amputee center program manager] and said, 'It's a shame I can't do more here,' and he said, 'I wish we could create a job for you.' That was the spark that started this."

Rozelle pores over blueprints, picks paint colors and dreams about what he wishes he'd had while a patient at Walter Reed.

"I think, 'Where in this place are there tough transitions from room to room?' Even the slightest quarter of an inch can make a difference to someone learning to walk on two new legs."

Walking through Walter Reed one day in September, Rozelle pointed out the problems — and the solutions. In the hallways and stairways, soldiers take their first precarious steps or, as they advance, run laps.

In the physical therapy room, Army Sgt. Cristian Valle sat on a therapist's table rolling a ball to the brown-eyed baby sitting between him and his wife, Blanca. Thirteen amputees worked in the room on or near physical therapy beds lined up so closely they touched one another. Though Valle said he appreciates the care he receives, he's looking forward to the new center.

"This place is just too small," Valle said. "We walk around the hallways, and we can't get a real idea of what it'll be like facing obstacles in the real world. And it's just too many people in one area."

In the new center, an indoor running track will feature a harness so runners can be hooked into a rail on the ceiling.

"That way, when they fall, it's only a couple of inches," Rozelle said.

The track will also serve as inspiration. Rozelle said it can take am-



M. SCOTT MAHASKEY/STAFF

Maj. David Rozelle has his prosthetic foot adjusted by Ron Dickey, a registered orthotic and prosthetic technician, Sept. 20 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. A new amputee center, under construction, will ease the process for soldiers requiring adjustments to their prosthetic devices.

putees up to a year to grasp that they have lost a limb, and to work up the motivation and courage to start over again. For that reason, offices rimming the track will feature one-way glass so amputees working with psychiatrists can see what others have accomplished.

"We want to motivate them," Rozelle said. "It's tailored to all levels of care."

During his own physical therapy at Walter Reed, Rozelle said his wife sat with him — there was no where else for her to go. The new center will have two lounges — one for relaxing, and one equipped with computers and other resources for family members.

Gait-way to good health

Rozelle led the way into the Gait Analysis Room, where, on a previous visit, biomechanical engineer Brian Baum put reflective markers all over Rozelle's body. Eight cameras then recorded his movements as he ran on a treadmill.

Rozelle watched the resulting stick-man version of himself run against a grid so he could see if he needed to make any adjustments to his gait. "Great. I have achieved the right setup," he said, peering at the computer screen. "I was always throwing my foot too high."

Baum doesn't have the room he needs — or the equipment — to allow every service member to check his gait.

"I've been an amputee for three years," Rozelle said. "I know when something doesn't feel right. But the new guys? They don't know what it's supposed to feel like."

Baum said by watching the 3-D version of themselves, new amputees will learn how to move properly, rather than having to readjust later to get rid of bad habits. Improper movement can cause back, knee and hip problems. In the new center, Baum will have 23 cameras and a 34-by-49-foot room.

"The capabilities we are going to have in the new center are going

to allow us to go further," Baum said. "It's going to be a fantastic advancement for us," he said, adding that he hopes to give patients a way to answer questions such as, "Is it better to run with or without a prosthetic arm?" or "How can we better adjust the length of a prosthetic device?"

'It'll be instant gratification'

The day before his visit to the gait lab, Rozelle broke his prosthetic foot running. He walked into the prosthetics lab at Walter Reed, where 12 orthotists and prosthetists work elbow-to-elbow in a small room featuring large machines and the same smell as an auto body shop.

He showed prosthetist Ron Dickey the crack, as well as the spots where his foot rubs his leg raw. To make the adjustment, Rozelle had to make an appointment.

In the new center, a patient having a problem on a treadmill will be able to visit a prosthetist on site immediately. And several people may be fitted for new devices at once, rather than one at a time.

"It'll be instant gratification," Rozelle said. "The prosthetist can make an on-site adjustment while you're working out. There's no place like that in the world."

He led the way to the new site, formerly a grassy hill supporting nothing more than a sprinkler system. He opened the gate in a construction fence and watched as a backhoe scooped up piles of dirt.

"I like seeing that, man — it's good," he said. "They're going to come back and get the best care in the world." □

THE NATIONAL MS SOCIETY

We keep people with MS moving forward



Multiple sclerosis, a chronic, unpredictable, often disabling disease affects about 2.5 million people world-wide. Striking in the prime of life, MS changes lives and families forever.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society funds more MS research and provides more programs for people with MS and their families than any other MS organization in the world. For 60 years, we have been at the core of virtually every major breakthrough in treating and understanding the disease. Join us today!



CFC #0549

TOUR THE NEW CENTER

Maj. David Rozelle takes you on a walk-through of the amputee clinic now under construction. See the video at

ArmyTimes.com