



Ministry  
of Defence

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Reference: **FOI 2014/05333 correspondence dated: 22 September 2014**

Date: **16/10/2014**

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 22/09/2014 requesting the following information:

*'I'm producing a film for BBC West about the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and the legacy of the conflict. Would it be possible for you to provide me with details of the number of soldiers currently suffering with mental health issues/PTSD? If this number can be further broken down for my region - which includes Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire that would be very useful'*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I am writing to confirm that MOD holds some of the information on the subject you have requested. However, I have to advise you that we will not be able to answer your request without exceeding the appropriate cost limit. This is because to locate, retrieve and extract information in scope of your request would involve the manual search of all patient medical records for all Armed Forces personnel who are currently suffering with mental health issues, at more than one year of effort.

Section 12 of the Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit, which for central government is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3.5 working days in determining whether the department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it.

The MOD may be able to provide some information in scope of your request if you reduce or refine your request to bring the cost of compliance under the limit.

Under section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) I can advise that MOD hold raw data from which we could consider providing the following information if requested.

We are able to provide you, for the period 1 April 2007 – 30 June 2014 with:

- The number of UK Armed Forces personnel who have been identified as having previously deployed to Afghanistan prior to their episode of care at a Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH) for a mental health disorder, including PTSD.

- The number of UK Armed Forces personnel who have been identified as having previously deployed to Afghanistan prior to their admittance to the MOD in-patient provider for a mental health disorder, including PTSD.
- Of those who are still serving in the Armed Forces, where those personnel are currently stationed by region, as specified in your request.

Statistics on new episodes of care for mental health disorders for UK Armed Forces personnel since 2007/08, including those previously deployed to Afghanistan, are routinely published at : <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/defence-mental-health-statistics-index>

Please contact me if you would like to refine your request or require advice on doing so.

UK Armed Forces personnel have access to specialist mental health services, by referrals made by their GP, provided through MOD DCMH or MOD In-patient providers. DCMH are specialised psychiatric services based on community mental health teams closely located with primary care services at MOD sites in the UK and abroad. All UK based and aero-medically evacuated Service personnel based overseas requiring in-patient admission are treated by one of eight NHS trusts in the UK which are part of a consortium headed by the South Staffordshire and Shropshire NHS Foundation trust (SSSFT). UK based Service personnel from British Forces Germany (BFG) were treated at Guys and St Thomas Hospital in the UK up until April 2013 and from this date, at Gilead IV hospital, Bielefeld, under a contract with Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Family Association (SSAFA) through the Limited Liability Partnership.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) recognises mental health illness as a serious and disabling condition and has committed £7.4 million to ensure there is extensive mental health support in place for those who need it.

We are working to address the perception of stigma attached to mental ill-health and people's reluctance to seek help. Support is available throughout the Chain of Command and Defence Medical Services for serving personnel who feel they might be suffering from mental ill health. They can also approach military welfare officers, padres and unit welfare organisations as well as the Big White Wall, an online mental well-being service available to serving personnel and their families on a 24-hour basis. There is also a 24-hour helpline with Combat Stress so serving personnel can seek help at any time.

We expect about 20 to 25 per cent of all Armed Forces personnel to have a common mental health disorder, which is broadly similar to the rates in the civilian population. While it is difficult to predict what may happen in the future, ongoing research together with the large number of mental health initiatives that have been implemented over the past ten years means we can be confident that we have first class systems in place to offer help and assistance to those serving personnel and veterans that need it.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Defence Statistics (Health) Head (B1)