



STAFF SGT. JEREMY ROSS/MARINE CORPS

A Marine works out at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan. In an effort to prevent and treat musculoskeletal injuries, the Corps plans to make athletic trainers available to infantry units by fiscal 2014.

Athletic trainers in your unit

Marines who have been through boot camp in the past decade might have interacted with athletic trainers. Now, all infantrymen can expect to see them in their battalions — and the initiative could go Corpswide.

The Marine Corps anticipates adding 18 new athletic trainers to fill roles in infantry battalions, according to an Oct. 2 solicitation. The trainers are slated to head to Camp Lejeune, N.C.; Camp Pendleton and Twentynine Palms, Calif.; Marine Corps Base Hawaii; and Okinawa, Japan, by October 2013.

The Sports Medicine and Injury Prevention program operating at both recruit depots and Officer Candidates School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., has been touted as a success in rehabbing injured trainees and getting them back to training. And Maj. Gen. Tom Murray, commanding general of Training and Education Command, told *Marine Corps Times* in September that — if trainers are successful in infantry battalions — officials will take a look at what can be done for the rest of the service.

What you need to know:

1 First, for grunts. It won't be unusual for infantrymen to start seeing athletic trainers on the physical training fields, said Brian McGuire, program director for the Corps' Physical Readiness Program. They'll assist in the development of PT programs, the solicitation states.

"They'll be working with martial arts trainers and swim instructors, complementing other existing Marine Corps assets," McGuire said.

2 Next, for noninfantry? Murray said the first step was infantry battalions because, after entry-level training, that was the place seeing the

most musculoskeletal injuries. But if the initiative is a success, it won't stop there. McGuire said it stands to reason that the trainers' effectiveness in preventing injuries or rehabbing injured Marines would be similar in noninfantry units.

3 Improving resiliency. The commandant called on the Marine Corps to boost its resiliency, and McGuire said expanding the use of athletic trainers helps them meet that goal.

"We have a program that over the last decade has been successful, so expanding it to the operating forces is really exciting," he said.

4 Injury-proofing. Part of the push to make Marines more resilient is to ensure they are ready for whatever they face. Trainers won't just work to fix Marines after they're hurt, but will also help develop training that makes them stronger and less injury-prone.

"A good example of that is the box jump exercise," McGuire said. "It has the effect of helping increase the ability to change directions and it helps with deceleration time — all at the same time that it strengthens bones, tendons and muscles."

5 Other benefits. The program won't just prevent and treat things like sprained ankles. Athletic trainers will also be tasked with providing mild traumatic brain injury management support. And as the use of athletic trainers in the military becomes more common, more of them will have knowledge of issues related to troops.

"They also come in with professional sports training, collegiate sports or even Olympic experience," McGuire said. "That diversity suits them well to work with the military population."

— Gina Harkins