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## Army commander: More mental health workers needed

### Army vice chief of staff to visit Fort Campbell today

By *KEVIN MAURER*  
*Associated Press*

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — A top Army commander said Wednesday at Fort Bragg that repeated deployments strain relationships and factor in the spike in suicides among Army personnel.

“Over 70 percent of the cases last year, this thing starts with a problem with a relationship,” Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli told reporters at North Carolina’s Fort Bragg. “It is usually compounded by some other issue that occurs. It could be financial, legal, substance abuse or trouble with the law. ... We have to work programs that will help people mend those relationships.”

Fort Bragg was his second stop on an eight-day tour looking at the suicide prevention training and to discuss best practices. He will be at Fort Campbell, Thursday and plans to visit six other posts including Fort Hood, Tex., Fort Carson, Colo., and Fort Lewis, Wash.

Last year, the Army had 140 suspected suicides among active-duty troops, an all-time high. It reported 24 suspected suicides in January, followed by 18 suspected last month. Each military branch, however, saw an increase in the number of suicides among its ranks from 2007 to 2008.

Chiarelli said a shortage of mental health workers is another major problem.

“Based on what I heard today and what I heard at Fort Jackson yesterday, probably the area that we need to work the hardest is to continue to try and find ways to bring on mental health care providers and bring them down to a level where soldiers have easier access to them,” he said.

But adding more doctors might not solve the problem because there is still a stigma associated with asking for help. The general said putting resources online and reaching out to spouses is one way around it.

Chiarelli has vowed to tackle the Army’s suicide problem aggressively and is receiving a briefing on the circumstances leading up to every suicide, so he can better understand the problem. He had his first set of briefs on the first 15 suicides in 2009 about three weeks ago.

“It was a two and a half hour session and it was one of the most intense two and half hours I’ve spent,” he said. “It was an experience I will never forget.”

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