

Ep. 13: Introducing Frances Martinez, the new Director of Psychological Health

[Narrator] Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960th Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended. (Upbeat music)

[Chris] All right, gladiators, welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I'm Chief Master and Chris Howard. I am the 960th COG Superintendent, and today with me I have. - [Frances] Frances Martinez, I'm the new Director of Psychological Health for the 960th. So I'm happy to be here today. - [Chris] Awesome, well welcome ma'am. I appreciate you coming on board. We look forward to working with you. And to be honest with you, the Director of Health is a different; it's a new position. Can you tell us a little bit about what that position is by chance? - [Frances] Well, we're gonna be learning together what this position really is. - [Chris] Okay. - [Frances] So primary responsibilities are to address the wing's mental health needs, right? What does that mean? Anywhere from suicide prevention to a sexual assault response coordinator, any type of outreach and education and whatever our service members and their families really need. - [Chris] Okay. Now I understand, right? So, when we look at overarching airman development and being good wingmen, mental health is one of those key pieces that fall under the pillars, right? And how do we take care of airmen? So I think that, when we focus on some of these things that position is actually gonna be very useful. So I know prior to us coming onto the podcast, we talked a little bit about suicide prevention. I was wondering if you can kind of tell me some of your thoughts of where we're going with suicide prevention as I believe Suicide Prevention Month is coming up, right? - [Frances] Correct, so with Suicide Prevention Month coming up we have some plans as far as different types of training and outreach to our service members. I know a lot of people are projecting that suicide is going to increase, especially with COVID. Unfortunately we won't have the outcome measures for about two years. So, we don't know what the impact is right now with COVID and suicide. We can only say and feel that there has been an increase. I know we've discussed with Colonel Erredge before that our goal is zero suicide. And that's really what the focus is gonna be. So, how do you prevent suicide is one of the biggest questions. - [Chris] Right, it's one of those so open end questions of there's so many different variables and factors for each individual, just much like any airman and any person, there's so many things that come into play, then how can we prevent all of those stressors from affecting those airmen? And I think it really comes down to we're not going to prevent them, right? But how do we engage with those airmen and then their families, and then help them deal with those stressors, right? Because there's good stressors, there's bad stressors. And what we're really talking about is those bad stressors that get after him in life, right? - [Frances] Right, and some things we can't control. Like the wildfires, we have units

out there in California right now. We can't control those things. But the things that we can get ahead of and control, that's really what we're gonna try to focus on. - [Chris] Okay. I'll be honest with you, I'm just really excited about talking to you, so I kind of jumped right into the business of what you do. So, actually, can you tell us a little bit about yourself? A little bit of your background. - [Frances] Okay, well, I'm originally from California, the LA area. My dad joined the military when I was younger. So I grew up an army brat. My husband actually is also in the military, about to retire. So my whole life has been military. So, for me, I can say I understand because I truly do understand, right? I understand what people are really going through in their life stressors. I've been through multiple deployments with my husband, my dad's been deployed multiple times. So, I understand everything as far as being a single parent during the deployments, dealing with young children during deployments, and just the whole taxing separation. - [Chris] Right. Well, there's the reintegration afterwards, right? That seems to be a very touchy point that I'm sure you can speak to from personal experience of readjusting with the new paradigm that comes with post deployment. - [Frances] Right. - [Chris] And then the stressors of redeployment, of getting ramped up to, "Oh my gosh, I'm gonna have to do this alone." Right? And then, your deployer also stressing with "These are all the things I gotta get done, I wanna get out there and get the mission taken care of and get back to my family." - [Frances] Another thing is the lack of support, right? So a lot of our service members are not at a home location or their home of record, right? They have moved physical start by family support. So that's where I come in, too, to be that additional support for those people. - [Chris] Gotcha. That makes sense, right? There's some key things that we do tend to forget at times, especially when we're talking about how military life almost puts you in a transient state, especially when we talk about our regular Air Force partners, where they actually PCS on a regular basis. With the reserves, obviously we have a little bit more leeway. We're allowed to have a little bit more selection in where we're going. But often these are transplants from somewhere else to begin with, right? So I'm a California kid, myself. You're from California. I've just been lucky personally, that just recently over the last couple of years, I've had family move closer to us, so I can leverage that family entity. So I think that you getting involved and then the key spouse program getting involved, then we can build, what we consider a military family. Can you speak a little bit about your feelings on that? - [Frances] Yeah, so I've reached out to our key spouse mentor already. And so we are going to try to get with the key spouses at all the different units and have a webinar or a Zoom meeting to really discuss what each unit really needs, and focus on the needs assessment for what they need instead of me just developing all these programs that one's really going to use, right? So I want to make sure that we're touching the people with these different outreach programs. But again, it's something that they're requesting. - [Chris] Right. And I also see that another key position that you're going to interact with and tell me if I'm wrong is the first sergeant, right? So the first sergeant's in there taking care of some of those businesses, taking care of the member, taking care of the family. Now we have a key spouse, now we have you, so we have almost a new triad when it comes to that family support piece and the mental health of our airmen as a whole. So are you going to reach out to the first sergeant as well? -

[Frances] Yes, I'll be reaching out, that's on my agenda or my to do list is to reach out to each unit's for sergeants and also introduce myself to the commanders of each unit. That way they all know that I'm out there and I'm available. Those are my plans in the coming months, to schedule those types of meetings via Zoom or just conference calls. - [Chris] Right, no I fully agree. And that's one of the reasons why we wanted to really get you in on the podcast here, on the Sword and Shield, right? Is kind of an introductory of "Hey, this is who Frances is, right? This is what I do. And here are some of the things that I'm looking at doing so that we can start making those first connections. So that we can build that triad. So that we're building up our airmen and getting after some of those stressors that we talked about, right?" So we talked about deployments a little bit, we talked a little bit about suicide prevention. Are there any other big subjects we're looking at maybe trying to tackle in these first few months? - [Frances] Those were the biggest ones on my agenda right now. But some of the other things that we do have to include are the diversity and inclusion, right? With everything, with the social unrest, riots, and protest, and things like that. So that might be affecting our service members in different ways. Whether it be they are feeling some. - [Chris] Residual effects, right? - [Frances] Right. - [Chris] I mean, they're stressors, right? So we're seeing everything that we are sent here to protect, right? We see cracks. We see it, and it doesn't matter where you sit in life. It doesn't matter necessarily what you agree to from a political perspective, but there's a lot of these other stressors, right? So we're going through just the normal ebb and flow of change within the military, we have COVID, now we have social unrest. And all of that starts eating at you, whether you think that this is right or that one's wrong, all those stressors come into play. And that's where you come in, right? And help us identify what we can do as an organization to start preventing some of those stressors or helping us deal with some of those stressors. - [Frances] Right. And then that's my biggest thing is to really teach people coping skills, right? I'm a therapist at heart, I do psychotherapy as well. But my biggest thing and what I like to tell people is that I want to make you your own therapist. I want to give you all the tools and fill up your toolbox, that way you can really do what you need to do without me. So that's the real goal is to help you cope with all the life stressors without it being a negative coping stressor like suicide. - [Chris] Right, or alcoholism or other types of behavior that's not conducive with health or necessarily service, right? Sometimes, and this is just me speaking for myself, there tends to be a feeling of negativity towards, we used the word therapist, but I want to argue the fact that that's not true, right? There's a lot of help when it comes to different types of therapies, whether it's talk therapy or otherwise, right? - [Frances] Right. So mental health in itself has a negative stigma. You know, "I'm scared as a service member to go to the mental health clinic because I don't want to be diagnosed with depression, bipolar." You can go in a room and ask a hundred people, "Raise your hand if you have diabetes." A lot of people will raise their hand. You can say, "Raise your hand if you have hypertension." You're going to have people raise their hand. You're going to ask someone, "Raise your hand if you've been diagnosed bipolar." How many people do you think are gonna actually raise their hand to that? - [Chris] Right. So, just kind of to be a sharer, I've actually had to talk to a therapist a couple of times during some stressful times in my life. I used the

Military Family Life counselors to talk through some of those issues. That's where I'm coming from personally, is that there's some good things that can come from it, right? It doesn't necessarily mean that, "Oh my gosh, there's a negative context to this." And I think that's one of the things that I would like to personally get out there and support you in support of our airmen is the fact that that negative connotation is more rumor than it is reality, right? Even with security clearances within Cyber, people start to be concerned about that when the reality is that if you're doing what you need to do to take care of yourself, then there's not going to be negative connotation, right? - [Frances] Right. So I'm the person before you go to the mental health clinic. Okay, so the therapy that we'll be doing, if any, sometimes it's just, "I need to vent and talk through some stuff." And it's not really therapy. It's just active listening and sometimes you feel better after you vent a couple times. So there's no documentation of anything that we're doing. It's short, brief talk therapy. If I feel like you're needing additional support, I'm not going to be the one to provide that. And it's similar to the Military Life, Family Life consultants, where they do those eight-week hour-long sessions. - [Chris] There's different things, right? And the importance here is really, here are our starting points, right? We have you, we have a first sergeant, and then now we're talking about, "Okay, I can do so much within this realm." We're sure what it's going to be like, "I can listen to you today, can help you work on this. And then let me get you to our mental health provider here. And then we also want to find other resources." You're going to do something similar, but you're, being licensed professional, you'll be able to talk a little bit more, but it's more of to help assess the situation and find the right avenue and program for them to then get into, correct? - [Frances] Correct. - [Chris] Okay. I'd hate for it, because otherwise I'll be knocking on your door all the time, night and day. (Frances laughs) - [Chris] Knock knock, knock knock, right? "I need to vent about this or that, because life is-" - [Frances] and that's what I'm here for ultimately. - [Chris] Life is a little bit crazy, yeah. - [Frances] And it's not really just for the reservists and their families, it's for anyone that's working in the 960th, whether it be a civilian or a contractor, I'm available to everyone. - [Chris] Gotcha. Well, that's great, right? Sometimes we do get focused just on the uniform wearer and the reality is that when we talk about what is the 960th Cyber Wing? It's a mix of our civilians, our uniform wearer, and then of course the support entities of our family. Right, so that whole big picture. And then being able to reach out to you, what are some of the programs that you might know of that can help our airmen out? - [Frances] The Family Support Center or the Airman and Family Readiness Center, chaplain services for those that have that religious or faith-based background. The Military Family Life Consultants are great. Military OneSource. Those are gonna be some great options as well. - [Chris] Awesome. Going back to the suicide prevention and dealing with the stressors, are there any things that you can see that might, just for a general listener, as we've talked about all of these different stressors, right? That some exercises or anything that they could do right now to help them decompress when we're dealing with all these other things outside? - [Frances] So self care is always the biggest thing, right? A lot of people take on more than what they can really handle. I've done that, I know a lot of people generally do that. So the biggest thing to do is set boundaries for yourself. Some people like to work really long hours, and they get phone calls and

texts nonstop. And so it's really good setting those boundaries and setting yourself up for some good family time. - [Chris] Okay, so you and I were discussing this and I told you that I'm taking phone calls and texts all day, all through the evening. How would you help me establish what some of those boundaries might be? - [Frances] So we're going to have to rank what's more important to you, right? Work or your family, or- - [Chris] Well after 20 years, I'm pretty sure the Air Force is going to hug me at night, right? (Frances laughs) - [Chris] No? Not so much? - [Frances] I don't know. - [Chris] Okay, all right. So yeah, we balance those out, right? So we have to rank priorities within our life. What other things would we look at for those boundaries? - [Frances] So, that's the biggest thing, is that you need to set boundaries for yourself. And then spend time for yourself, right? So there's yourself, there's your work, your family, and how do you manage all of those things? And then spend equal, or sometimes you can't spend equal time, right? You work at 40 plus hours a week, your family is divided, so how do you really separate those things out to make sure that you're taking care of yourself? - [Chris] Okay. Right, yeah. Especially when you start putting in some of those COVID pieces, right? So now I've got my family around me all day and I've got teenagers, right? And then I've got a young'un and then we're doing school, we're doing, everybody's fighting for Internet space. I get that scrolling thing on my Netflix at night, right? So finding what those priorities are. Are there any other, so other than boundaries, what else can we do for self-care? - [Frances] So a lot of people like to exercise. I'm trying to get into that habit right now. - [Chris] I hate it, I'll be honest with you. Exercise, there's some endorphins released, I get it. But when can I find time? - [Frances] Exactly, you have to schedule that in, right? Because everyone's, well a lot of people are schedule based, right? If it's not in my schedule, I don't have 25 hours in the day. But it's really getting that scheduled then to do. - [Chris] I'd like to peel back on the priorities piece a little bit more, right? Because we do tend to find that I have way more priorities than I've got time for. So do you have any tools or any words of advice on how to realistically look at what is a priority and what is not a priority? - [Frances] So as far as a therapist goes, we never give advice. - [Chris] Gotcha - [Frances] so the first thing that we will do is talk about problem solving skills. Now, you tell me what you think your priorities are and I'm going to help you manage them. So that's how we would look at it. So as far as advice giving, I don't generally do that because- - [Chris] Fair, right. No, I ask it in a way that's, how do I go forward with my own self-care? And how can I identify what truly is and is not important? What truly is and is not a priority so that we can balance it, right? Because we have multiple bosses. You have bosses civilian wise, but you also have the bosses in the family, right? My kids are a boss, my spouse is a boss. I'm responsible to so many different people for one thing or another. So how do I prioritize those things? - [Frances] Well, we have to really dig deep and find out what is your number one priority. So at the end of the day, for me it's my family. My family is always going to be number one, Work is obviously, you have to work to support your family. And so you have to really look at it in those lenses and prioritize that way. - [Chris] Gotcha. All right, some good words of thought, versus advice, right? Food for thought. And then, so we kind of got onto exercise piece. What are some other tools that we might be able to use? - [Frances] So when you're talking about self-care, self-care is not

just physical, right? We're looking at mental self-care and spiritual for those that are religious. And so, prayer time, meditation, yoga, those are also really good free things to do. Separating yourself and going in your closet, if that's the only quiet space that you have, to just lay down and meditate, do some deep breathing exercises and pray or utilize some yoga or Tai Chi, things like that. - [Chris] Okay. Gotcha. Are there any other tools we can use for self-care? I'm asking because I don't know. - [Frances] Some other things, I mean it costs some money and some people; they don't like to spend money. But I always like massages and any of those types of pampering type things, just to decompress. A lot of people like going on vacations, spending time at the beach. - [Chris] Fishing, hunting, - [Frances] Fishing exactly. - [Chris] Swimming, it's just different things. - [Frances] Whatever you find enjoyment in. - [Chris] Gotcha. Hiking, biking. All right. Just throwing some ideas out there, right, because I don't know what else is out there. Just spit balling here, okay. - [Frances] Painting, - [Chris] Painting yeah. - [Frances] Eating. Cooking - [Chris] cooking candy, right? Until the cleanup phase, and then that just goes all kinds of crazy. Yeah, I'll cook and then my wife walks into the kitchen is like, "(groans) What did you do? Why did you do this to my kitchen? It was clean, it was pretty and you've messed it up." So now I've gotta de-stress her. - [Frances] That's why you have kids. - [Chris] I blame it on the kids. "Well, it was them, it was them. They came in here, next thing you know you wanted waffles and chicken nuggets." And I got a teenage boy that me out of house and home. So that's a case of corn dogs for lunch right there. The state fair (mumbles) they can eat. And then of course I get the little one that eats chicken nuggets like they're going out of style. - [Frances] Me too. My three-year-old is just chicken nugget and the French fries. - [Chris] Gotcha, awesome. I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today. I know we barely scratched the surface on any of these things. But I look forward to working with you from a leadership perspective and helping our airmen find some of these programs. Are there any other things that you might want to put out there as this introductory piece? And I know we're gonna talk to you many more times. - [Frances] Yeah, well, I actually received some of the Happy or Not feedback. And so I'm going to start addressing some of those concerns, that everyone has. Biggest one last time was COVID related and feeling safe. So we're going to talk about some education pieces in the future. But I will be utilizing that tool to really gauge and get some information and some feedback. What our people really need. - [Chris] Okay. Yeah, and we also have some other avenues, right? So we have through the Air Force Connect direct messaging to the command chief and to the commander. So for those out there, for those gladiators, if Happy or Not is not something that you look forward to or use, please utilize the Air Force Connect app. Please utilize your email or director your unit if Happy or Not is not working so that we can get this information funneled and you can actually start breaking that down and really getting after the problems that we're seeing as gladiators, right? - [Frances] Right. - [Chris] So anything else, ma'am, that you wanna add? - [Frances] No, I look forward to meeting everyone, hopefully in person someday, when travel is more appropriate, reaching out to the different units and hopefully, going there in person and meeting people. - [Chris] Awesome. Thank you ma'am I really do appreciate your time. I look forward to all the good work that you're going to be doing here as part of the 960th

Cyber Wing. And to the gladiators out there, once again, thank you for your time. Thank you for your service. Thank you for your dedication to America, to your fellow citizens, and to the mission here at the 960th. So, with that I wish you well and a good day. (Upbeat music)