

Hundreds of service members volunteer to support coronavirus efforts

By Sarah Cammarata

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The Army is now asking Army civilians to extend their service to other areas as Navy and Air Force members raise their hands to stay in the service and help respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Army initially put out a call for retirees to come back and help. Of the 27,000 who initially expressed interest, only 6,000 retiree recalls are from medical career fields. Plus, some of those 6,000 also chose to serve in the local community instead of being called up.

Even though former soldiers came out by the thousands to offer to help, Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Junel Jeffrey said in an interview, the majority did not come from medical backgrounds — the first area the Army was focused on targeting.

About 400 people are being considered for service by the Army Surgeon General “following an intricate vetting process,” Jeffrey said in a statement.

“We are now at the point of placing the fully vetted volunteers on active-duty orders,” Jeffrey said. As of late Monday, 73 are on military orders. “More than 200 more [are] being processed. These numbers will continue to grow based on emerging requirements,”

Lengthy background checks have also delayed the process of sending out orders. Normally, she said, a process like this takes several months, but the Army has expedited many things to meet demand.

The Army is now reaching out to 2,500 of its career civilians by email “who have a medical-related degree, but were not working in direct patient care,” Jeffrey said.

As of last Friday, “we have received about 115 applications from 102 employees and are vetting the volunteers for placement in support of Army COVID-19 support efforts.”

Meanwhile, more than 650 members of the Navy and the Air Force who are close to retirement have extended their military service.

The Navy has received about 600 extension and waiver requests from sailors who are serving, and about 30 requests from retirees seeking to return to the Navy as of last week, Navy Personnel Command spokesperson Lt. Cmdr. Matt Knight said in a statement.

Unlike the Army and the Navy, the Air Force is not seeking out retired medical professionals, but is “focused on extended volunteers in medical career fields who are currently scheduled to retire or separate by asking them if they would be willing to delay their departure from the Air Force,” said Air Force spokesperson Capt. Carrie Volpe.

“We have approximately 60 (officer and enlisted) members in the medical community who have already elected to withdraw their separation or retirement applications in order to assist with Covid-19 response efforts,” Volpe said.

The Veterans Affairs Department, which launched [an aggressive campaign to bring back retired medical professionals](#) in tandem with the services' efforts, has brought in 3,183 staff members, which includes both retirees and new employees. Of those, 981 are registered nurses, VA spokesperson Christina Noel said.