



# News Release

**Contact**

ERMC Public Affairs Office

DSN 590-2115

Tel. +49 6371-9464-2115

[usarmy.sembach.medcom-ermc.list.pao@mail.mil](mailto:usarmy.sembach.medcom-ermc.list.pao@mail.mil)

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## New system reduces EFMP processing time, paperwork

By Ed Drohan

Europe Regional Medical Command Public Affairs

SEMBACH KASERNE, Germany – Processing Exceptional Family Member Program family travel request cases used to take weeks and involved file cabinets full of paperwork. But not anymore.

With a new system that started May 1, all EFMP files received by the Europe Regional Medical Command are now processed digitally, cutting both processing time and paperwork drastically.

The command's EFMP office processes all family travel requests for military members and civilian employees with assignments to Europe whose families will be seen in Army clinics under the command's control and, in some cases such as embassy personnel and remote assignments, by other medical providers. This includes any family members with medical or educational special needs, said ERMC EFMP director Leslie Garcia.

"Any time a family member has a chronic condition, they are enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program," Garcia explained. Those conditions could include anything from diabetes and asthma to multiple sclerosis and autism.

The goal of the EFMP is to ensure that family members with special needs can have those needs met in the community where they'll be assigned, whether at an Army Health Clinic or by host nation providers. Each request is screened by the EFMP office and a medical provider before a recommendation is made to U.S. Army Human Resources Command as to whether or not the family member's special needs can be supported in the area where an assignment is being considered.

Before May 1, each case/request was printed out, processed at the EFMP office at Sembach Kaserne, then sent by courier once a week to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center to be screened by the provider, before being returned by courier to the EFMP office. The provider would receive an average of 70 cases each week.

Once processed, the cases/requests then had to be filed for five years before they could be destroyed. A row of file cabinets covers most of the wall in the ERMC EFMP office containing cases for one year with cases dating back four more years covering remaining walls in that and another office.

Garcia and ERMC Family Services chief Capt. Edward Donnarumma worked with ERMC information technology and Installation Management Command Europe to come up with the technical infrastructure and forms to allow EFMP packages to be processed digitally rather than manually.

"Now we receive a hand-signed family travel request by email, but instead of printing it out it's all

digitally annotated,” Donnarumma said. Once the case is reviewed by the EFMP office and any concerns highlighted and annotated, the file is placed on a restricted and encrypted network drive where it can be accessed immediately by the provider. The new system has cut processing time dramatically.

“Now the day I put it in (the online folder) and send the provider an email, he usually clears them the same day,” Garcia said.

The new system also means the provider can still review the files even if he’s working from another location, Donnarumma explained, since the files can be accessed on the provider’s laptop computer from wherever they may be working that day.

The digital system not only makes processing cases faster, but it makes pulling reports easier as well. Instead of having to go back and pull paper files, the system now collates most of the information automatically.

With the digital system, those rooms of file cabinets will eventually go away as well. There will be no paper files to replace the retiring five-year-old files at the end of the year, so two rooms of file cabinets will be emptied by the end of the five year cycle, Donnarumma said.

While most of the new system will be transparent to the military and family members being served by it, faster processing times will mean fewer delays for families waiting for word on their new assignment.

“This has improved our process and added reliability to the program,” said Lt. Col. Graeme Bicknell, ERMC chief of Behavioral Health. “Information can be shared among the proper people faster, and decisions and appeals can be made faster. This should increase the confidence in the entire family travel process.”

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**ERMC Exceptional Family Member Program director Leslie Garcia shows what one year of EFMP family travel requests looks like when filed. A new digital system for processing EFMP cases is streamlining the process and eliminating the need to file paper copies like these. (Photo by Ed Drohan, Europe Regional Medical Command Public Affairs)**