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BOOSTER SHOTS: Oddities, musings and news from the health world

What war vet J.R. Martinez could do, 'Dancing With the Stars'



J.R. Martinez, an Iraqi war vet, is rumored to appear on the next season of "Dancing With the Stars." He's seen here on "All My Children." (Carol Kaelson / ABC)

By Jeannine Stein, Los Angeles Times / For the Booster Shots blog
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The cast members of the new season of ABC's "[Dancing With the Stars](#)" have been leaked. There's one name that may be unfamiliar to some: J.R. Martinez. His turn on the show could make a difference to soldiers and war veterans, not to mention dance fans.

Martinez, 28, is an Iraq war vet who sustained burns to more than 40% of his body, including his face, after hitting a land mine while deployed with the Army in Iraq in 2003. He has undergone 33 cosmetic and skin graft surgeries.

Since then he's become a motivational speaker and an actor, appearing on the ABC soap "All My Children." And he's aligned himself with a number of veteran-related causes, one of which is [Iraq Star Inc.](#), a national nonprofit foundation that provides reconstructive surgery to Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans to help them return to their homes, lives and careers.

Could someone like Martinez be a good role model for soldiers and vets who are grappling with similar injuries and surgeries?

"No question about it," said Dr. Timothy Miller, executive director of [Operation Mend](#), a partnership among the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, and the V.A.-Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System that treats U.S. military members who have been seriously wounded while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. "He's got some scars, but I'm sure he looks better than he did. I can't speak for him, but I'm willing to say he's more pleased or happier now than before his reconstruction."

Miller says he's seen spirits lifted among patients treated via Operation Mend: "Sometimes we're averaging six to eight operations on someone, and some go to 15," he says. "They can extend over a year and a half. I can tell you without hesitation that their mood is definitely improved [as reconstructive surgeries improve their wounds]. They are much more outgoing and much happier."

Having a solid support system is critical to helping patients through tough times, he adds. "So many people have very strong families that are very dedicated -- that's the most important thing, I think." Fellow patients help each other as well, as Martinez has done for his fellow soldiers. "I know there's a certain understanding and special feeling among people who have had serious injuries. They want to be helpful -- it's a natural thing."