VA research on AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ VETERANS

VA researchers are seeking new ways to restore ill and injured Veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to their highest level of functioning, and helping create the best life possible for them when they return home.

ABOUT AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ VETERANS

• The newest generation of Veterans is characterized by an increased number of Reservists and National Guard members who served in combat zones; a higher proportion of women; and different patterns of injuries, such as multiple injuries from explosions, than were seen among Veterans of previous wars.

• Many service members may need mental health care after returning from duty. Service members may experience symptoms of psychological distress, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Other issues may include stress, mood, anxiety, sleep, psychotic, and addictive disorders.

• Veterans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan are surviving in greater numbers than in previous conflicts due to advances in body armor, battlefield medicine, and medical evacuation transport. As a result, more Veterans are living with disabling injuries, including the often-lifelong effects of traumatic brain injury (TBI).

• Afghanistan and Iraq combat Veterans can receive cost-free medical care for any condition related to their service in the theater of war for five years after the date of their discharge or release.

VA RESEARCH ON AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ VETERANS: OVERVIEW

• VA researchers are seeking new ways to address the mental health issues of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, including PTSD. They are also researching TBI and its treatment, and are developing and testing prostheses that will allow Veterans with amputations or other issues to live as independently as possible.

• VA is working on new programs and services to help Veterans reintegrate after deployment. Researchers are looking at how transitioning out of the military affects Veterans' physical and emotional health, work, finances, and social relationships.

• VA's Polytrauma System of Care is the largest integrated system of care dedicated to the medical rehabilitation of Veterans and service members with multiple injuries. Research includes examining pain, TBI, and PTSD that co-occur, known as the polytrauma clinical triad.

• The National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans is an ongoing study of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans aimed at providing insight on the overall health of recent Veterans, improving VA's understanding of the health services Veterans need, and maximizing the quality of care VA offers to these Veterans.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

2010 - Began a longitudinal cohort study of the longer-lasting health effects of service during the Iraq war

2011 - Funded, along with the Department of Defense (DoD), two consortia to improve treatment for PTSD and mild TBI

2014 - Found that Veterans who sought and received care soon after the end of their service had lower rates of PTSD upon follow-up than those who waited to get treatment

2015 - Confirmed, by summarizing the results of 19 unique studies, that Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans had higher rates of respiratory problems during and after deployment

2015 - Began work with the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine and other partners to learn which programs and services are most helpful to Veterans as they reintegrate after deployment

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Researchers are looking at how transitioning out of the military affects Veterans’ physical and emotional health, work life, finances, and social relationships.