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**For Immediate Release:**

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**Ursano to lead largest ever study of suicide in the military**

**Bethesda, Md.** — Robert J. Ursano, M.D., director of the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress and chairman of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) Department of Psychiatry, will lead an interdisciplinary team of four research institutions to carry out a National Institute of Mental Health study – the largest study of suicide and mental health among military personnel ever undertaken, with \$50 million in funding from the U.S. Army.

The study is a direct response to the Army's request to NIMH to enlist the most promising scientific approaches for addressing the rising suicide rate among soldiers. Suicide rates among Army personnel have risen substantially since the beginning of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan despite major surveillance and intervention efforts introduced by the Army to prevent suicides over this period.

Four institutions will collaboratively conduct an epidemiologic study of mental health, psychological resilience, suicide risk, suicide-related behaviors, and suicide deaths in the U.S. Army. The consortium brings together research teams that are internationally known for their expertise and experience in research on military health, health and behavior surveys, epidemiology, and suicide, including genetic and neurobiological factors involved in suicidal behavior. Ursano will serve as project director. Consortium principal investigators are Steven Heeringa, Ph.D., at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Ronald Kessler, Ph.D., Harvard Medical School, Cambridge, Mass.; and John Mann, M.D., at Columbia University, New York City.

Dr. Ursano is a world-renowned expert in mental health and trauma and will work closely with the principal investigators as well as NIMH scientists and Army project officers. The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, a partnering center of the Defense Centers of Excellence for PTSD and TBI, conducts research and offers education, consultation and training on preparing for, and responding to, the psychological effects and health consequences of traumatic events.

The study will use several strategies to generate information on risk and protective factors:

- The Army already has a rich archive of data on its personnel. Study investigators will work to consolidate information from different databases and use this resource to identify possible suicide risk and protective factors.
- Investigators will undertake a retrospective case-control study in which individual soldiers who have attempted suicide with or without fatal outcomes (cases) will be matched with individuals with similar demographic characteristics (controls). Comparison of information gathered on cases and controls should provide clues to risk and protective factors.

## *Learning to Care for Those in Harm's Way*

- A survey for which 90,000 active Army personnel representative of the entire Army will be contacted will provide information on the prevalence of suicide-related behavior and risk and protective factors. When possible, saliva and blood samples will be collected for genetic and neurobiologic studies.
- All 80,000 to 120,000 recruits who enter the Army in each of the first three years of the study will be asked to participate in a survey similar to the all-Army survey above.

This research will encompass active duty Army personnel across all phases of service, including members of the National Guard and Reserves. Soldiers' confidentiality will be protected as investigators explore the nature of risk and protective factors and the timing of events that could influence risk, such as time since enlistment and deployment status and history.

Although planned to continue for 5 years, the study is designed to be able to identify quickly potential risk factors that can inform the continuing research project and the Army's ongoing efforts to prevent suicide among its personnel. Identification of risk and protective factors—including existing prevention strategies that show effectiveness in reducing suicide risk—is a means to the end of developing evidence-based interventions that are readily applicable in a military context and can be put into action quickly to reverse the increase in suicide rates.

Located on the grounds of Bethesda's National Naval Medical Center and across from the National Institutes of Health, USU is the nation's federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing. The university educates health care professionals dedicated to career service in the Department of Defense and the U.S. Public Health Service. Students are active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, natural disasters, emerging infectious diseases, and other public health emergencies. Of the university's nearly 4,400 physician alumni and more than 400 advanced practice nurses, the vast majority serve on active duty and are supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, offering their leadership and expertise. The University also has graduated more than 600 public health professionals.

For more information about USU and its programs, visit [www.usuhs.mil](http://www.usuhs.mil).