



## Largest Study of Suicide and Mental Health in Military to be Led by Dr. Ursano

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) announced at a press conference on July 17 that an interdisciplinary team of four research institutions will carry out the largest study of suicide and mental health among military personnel ever undertaken. To better identify risk and protective factors for suicide and provide a scientific base for more effective and practical interventions, NIMH and the Army signed a memorandum of agreement authorizing NIMH to undertake the investigation with the support of \$50 million in Army funding.

Suicide stands as the fourth leading cause of death among 25- to 44-year-olds in the United States. Historically, the rates of suicide have been lower in the military than among civilians. However, in 2008 that pattern was reversed; the suicide rate in the Army exceeded the age-adjusted rate in the latest data in the civilian population (20.2 out of 100,000 vs. 19.2).

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 since the start of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Planned to continue for five years, the study encompasses active duty Army personnel including members of the

National Guard and Reserve and is designed to identify potential risk and protective factors that can change the Army's and the nation's treatment and care for suicide risk.

"The alarming rise of suicide amongst those serving in the military is an urgent health issue that needs to be addressed," said the study's Project Director Robert J. Ursano, M.D., director of the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (a DCoE component center). "This in-depth study of Army personnel will undoubtedly allow us to better understand the many factors that surround suicide and mental health so that we can begin identifying measures to prevent suicide."

In addition to DCoE's Dr. Robert J. Ursano, Steven Heeringa, Ph.D., of the University of Michigan; Ronald Kessler, Ph.D., of Harvard Medical School; and John Mann, M.D., of Columbia University are participating as consortium principal investigators. The study will address a range of factors including unit cohesion, exposure to combat-related trauma, personal and economic stresses, family history, childhood adversity and abuse, and the overall mental health of Army personnel.

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*Photo credit Kenneth Frager, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences*

*Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Peter Chiarelli, Secretary of the Army Pete Geren, and Director of NIMH Dr. Thomas Insel discuss the partnership between the Army and the National Institute of Mental Health during a media roundtable at the Pentagon, July 16. The Army is funding a five-year, \$50 million study on risk and protective factors related to mental health and suicide in the Army. Also participating (L-R) were Dr. Robert Ursano of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Dr. Ronald Kessler, professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School, and Dr. Steven Heeringa, director of the Statistical Design Group at the University of Michigan.*



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## From the Director: Network of Support from DCoE Collaboration and Real Warriors Campaign Partnerships



*Brig. Gen. Sutton, M.D. DCoE Director*

You are not alone. This is a vital message of our recently launched Real Warriors Campaign – a multimedia public awareness campaign for service members, veterans and their loved ones. In the military, perceptions of stigma sometimes prevent service members and families from getting the help they need, when they need it most. Harnessing the power of personal stories, the campaign shares the experiences of real service members who have sought treatment and are continuing to maintain successful military or civilian careers. The stories

highlight the positive results of seeking care and encourage service members to increase their awareness of the resources available to them.

DCoE is a “Center of Centers,” leading a growing collaborative network throughout the nation and around the world charged with promoting warrior resilience, recovery and reintegration. Building networks of collaboration and sharing is crucial to helping our service members and their loved ones – making sure no one is on their own.

In the spirit of partnership, the Real Warriors Campaign invites the participation of organizations and programs that share the campaign’s mission and can help spread campaign messages. Potential partners include military organizations and programs, nonprofit organizations, advocacy organizations and local groups. At present, the campaign has more than 40 confirmed partners.

Partners support the campaign through a variety of activities such as adding a Real Warriors link and logo to their Web site, including Real Warriors articles in newsletters and distributing campaign brochures and flyers. Additionally, groups have begun using Real Warrior profiles in training events and presentations to service members and their families.

The Real Warriors Campaign leverages our DCoE Outreach Center, a 24/7 call center staffed by trained health resource consultants. The Outreach Center provides confidential answers, tools, tips and resources about psychological health and traumatic brain injury. The Outreach Center can be reached toll-free at **866-966-1020** or via e-mail at **resources@dcoeoutreach.org**.

We are excited about the campaign’s upcoming exhibits at the Family Readiness Summit in Chicago, Ill. August 31- September 4; the National Guard Association of the United States General Conference and Exhibition in Nashville, Tenn. September 10-13; and the Evolving Paradigms II Conference in Las Vegas, Nev. September 22-24.

I encourage you to reach out and get connected to sources of information and services from organizations that care for our service members and their loved ones. Be sure to visit the Real Warriors Campaign Web site, **www.realwarriors.net**, or call the DCoE Outreach Center, toll-free at **866-966-1020** for easy access to valuable tools and information.


To the journey ~

Loree K. Sutton, M.D.  
Brigadier General, MC, USA  
Director 

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The investigators will consolidate information from different databases to identify possible genetic risk factors associated with suicide, suicide behavior and risk and protective factors. The study includes surveys, interviews,

historical information and the collection of saliva and blood. A retrospective study will compare individual soldiers who have attempted suicide with or without fatal outcomes to individuals matching similar demographic characteristics without suicidal behaviors.

For three years, all individuals entering the Army will be invited to join the five-year study, which may include up to 500,000 participants. 

## DCoE and Sesame Street Workshop Collaborate on Interactive Web Site for Military Families

DCoE Director Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton joined Patty Shinseki, member of the board of directors of The Military Child Education Coalition; Gary E. Knell, president and CEO of Sesame Workshop; and Sesame Street's Elmo and his Dad in announcing the "Sesame Street Family Connections" Web site and the roll out of 35 "Sesame Rooms" across the United States at a July 16 press conference in Philadelphia.

The latest collaboration between DCoE and Sesame Workshop, the "Family Connections" Web site supports the ongoing program to help children cope with deployments, multiple deployments and injured parents. The Web site is designed to help keep children and adults connected when distance makes daily communication difficult.

Capt. (sel) Russell Shilling of DCoE has worked with Sesame Workshop since 2007 to develop and distribute more than 800,000 DVD outreach kits and the new Web site. The DVD video programs


won a prestigious CINE Golden Eagle Award in 2009. The "Family Connections" Web site contains all the video in the DVD kit along with two prime-time specials. Family members and friends can compose messages and create, share and collaborate on artwork. The Web site also supports uploading videos and photos. A special section of the site offers communication tips and features favorite Sesame Street characters talking about deployment.

"This rewarding opportunity to collaborate in launching such a creative Web site provides a vital tool in the recovery, resilience and reintegration toolbox that our military families need and deserve," said Brig. Gen. Sutton. "Families and warriors will be able to stay connected and share in a safe and nurturing place, joined by their special Sesame Street friends."

Sesame Workshop has also teamed with New York designer Jonathan Adler to create "Sesame Rooms," to brighten



spaces in which military children can play. The rooms-in-a-box were sent to 35 locations across the U.S. including libraries, military hospitals, child care centers and family support centers.

"Sesame Workshop is committed to providing our military families with the resources they deserve," said CEO Gary E. Knell. "We hope that *Talk, Listen, Connect*, which reaches out to all families with young children, will continue to help families discover ways they can be resilient despite experiencing difficult transitions in their lives." 

## Leadership Spotlight: Ms. Katherine Helmick


Ms. Kathy Helmick serves as the director of the TBI Clinical Standards of Care Directorate at DCoE as well as Interim Senior Executive Director for TBI at DCoE, while the next military director is recruited. She possesses both clinical and research experience in the field of neuroscience and holds bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing from the Virginia Commonwealth University and a bachelor's degree in family and child development from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Ms. Helmick has served in a variety of leadership, advisory and operational roles, including: manager at the Office of Clinical Standards, Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC), in Washington, D.C.; neurological

surgery nurse practitioner at Hodes Neurosurgery in Louisville, Ky.; nurse practitioner/clinical care coordinator at University of Louisville Hospital in Louisville, Ky.; and clinical research coordinator in the Division of Neurosurgery at the Medical College of Virginia Hospitals.

The TBI directorate develops and promotes optimal clinical standards of care for warriors sustaining TBI. "To be in the front seat of such an exciting endeavor has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I hold dearly and with much honor," said Ms. Helmick. "As Brig. Gen. Loree Sutton has told us numerous times, 'we cannot be patient, our mission is great and we need to stay focused to help serve those who serve

the United States so selflessly.' This is what drives me every day serving at DCoE!"

Ms. Helmick serves as the deputy director for the Clinical and Educational Affairs Division at DVBIC — a DCoE component center. DVBIC was established to prevent, treat, conduct research, and provide education on TBI for active duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members recently injured in the line of duty, their dependents and retired military personnel. Ms. Helmick serves as a key advisor to the DVBIC national director on all matters relating to the clinical and educational activities of the center and represents DVBIC at meetings. 



## New Technologies Bring Improved Access to Mental Health Care

Service members and their families seeking behavioral health care assistance to deal with the stresses of military life can turn to two new TRICARE programs that offer increased access to psychological counseling. Time and distance will no longer prevent people from getting the help they need.

The Web-based TRICARE Assistance Program (TRIAP) and telemental health program, both launched on August 1, use evolving telecommunications technologies to bring counseling assistance and behavioral health care within easy reach of beneficiaries.

TRIAP allows eligible beneficiaries to use a computer, Webcam and associated software to speak directly to a licensed counselor over the Internet at any time of the day or night. They can log onto the system an unlimited number of times to receive counseling services

– including assessments, short-term sessions or referral to more specialized or comprehensive care if necessary.


TRIAP is available to active duty service members, spouses, and other eligible family members 18 years of age or older who reside in the U.S. Enrollees in the Transitional Assistance Management Program and TRICARE Reserve Select may also take advantage of the service.

TRICARE's telemental health services use medically-supervised, secure audio-visual conferencing to link beneficiaries with offsite providers. These services are available to all TRICARE beneficiaries in the United States. TRICARE's regional contractors are establishing networks of telemental health originating sites and networks of offsite providers who can evaluate, treat and refer patients as necessary via video. Comprehensive behavioral health services are available,

including psychotherapy and medication management.

“While most service members will still get face-to-face care in military treatment facilities or through the TRICARE network, the addition of the telemental health care and TRIAP will really help us enhance access to a variety of behavioral health care services,” said Rear Adm. Christine Hunter, deputy director of the TRICARE Management Activity.

For information about TRICARE's telemental health options, go to the Getting Care link at <http://tricare.mil/mybenefit/home/MentalHealthAndBehavior>.

For more information on the TRIAP program go to <http://www.tricare.mil/TRIAP>. 

## TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Additional links to useful tools are available at [www.dcoe.health.mil](http://www.dcoe.health.mil)

### New TRICARE Counseling Resources for Service Members and Family Members

- TRICARE Telemental Health (<http://tricare.mil/mybenefit/home/MentalHealthAndBehavior>)
- TRICARE Assistance Program (<http://www.tricare.mil/TRIAP>)

### Resources for Veterans

- Veterans Health Administration, Office of Mental Health Services (<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>)
- My HealtheVet (<http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>)

### Suicide Study Grant

- National Institute of Mental Health (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>)
- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (<http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/>)

### Mark Your Calendars: Upcoming DCoE Conferences:

November 3-4, 2009 Warrior Resilience Conference, Norfolk, VA  
December 10, 2009 Trauma Spectrum Disorders Conference, Bethesda, MD  
January 10-15, 2010 DOD/VA Suicide Prevention Conference, Washington, DC

