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**Veterans Affairs Mental Health Research Continues on Multiple Fronts**

*Local VA Facility Part of Nationwide Research Effort*

**Salem, Virginia** – Coast to coast, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) investigators continue groundbreaking work to discover new treatments, identify the best existing therapies, and speed new research findings into mental health practice. These efforts, which address the wide spectrum of Veterans’ mental health concerns, help guide the work of VA’s growing numbers of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers**,** and other mental health professionals. **The Salem Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center** is part of this Nationwide effort.

As a tertiary referral center for Veterans with mental illness, the Salem VAMC also has specialized programs in PTSD treatment on an inpatient and outpatient basis. The location of the medical center, along with strong academic affiliations has assisted in recruiting and retaining quality faculty and staff to meet the mental health needs of returning Veterans.

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki noted that “as the tide of war recedes, we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans.”

To continue to develop and evaluate the most effective ways of addressing these needs, VA historically has turned to its research program, which focuses on a wide range of Veterans’ mental health concerns, including mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder; anxiety disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD); dementia and memory disorders; and substance abuse.

At the Salem VA Medical Center, Brooks King-Casas, PhD and his research team are studying the neuroscience behind interpersonal difficulties experienced by Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder often experience anger and aggression, which are critical barriers to recovery and re-integration. Thus, the effects of anger and aggression are devastating not only to Veterans’ lives, but also to Veterans’ families and communities.  Indeed, it is those Veterans who feel least able to control their own anger and aggression who are least able to benefit from current treatment protocols for PTSD. Although interpersonal difficulties have a serious impact on the lives of Veterans with PTSD, very little is understood about the causes of these difficulties.

Dr. King-Casas conducts functional magnetic resonance imaging of brain activity as Veterans perform social interaction games in fMRI scanners. The goal of this work is to understand the mechanisms of trust, anger, and aggression that affect the interpersonal relationships of Veterans, and to apply these findings to guide new treatments for improving social functioning in Veterans with PTSD.

“Mental health services must be closely aligned with Veterans’ needs and fully integrated with health care facility operations,” said Under Secretary for Health,

Dr. Robert Petzel. “Our mental health research must fully complement our ongoing mental health services for today’s Veterans.”

To learn more about VA Research on mental health, see [www.research.va.gov/outreach/research\_topics/mental\_health.cfm](http://www.research.va.gov/outreach/research_topics/mental_health.cfm).

To locate the nearest VA facility or Vet Center for enrollment for health care services or to get scheduled for care, Veterans can visit VA’s website at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov). Immediate help is available at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) or by calling the Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (push 1) or texting 838255.

For more information about mental health care that VA provides, visit:  <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>

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