



## VA/DoD PTSD Coach App Wins Award

One year after its realization, VA and DoD's Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Coach mobile app is the recipient of an award for innovation in the advancement of telemedicine from the American Telemedicine Association (ATA).

"The health and well-being of our brave men and women who have served this nation is our highest priority," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Using the popularity of mobile devices, we can provide important tools to veterans wherever they are, whenever they need them, whether or not they receive care through VA or DoD."

This app was developed with VA's National Center for PTSD and DoD's National Center for Telehealth & Technology and provides education, symptoms-tracking tools, a self-assessment section, and connections to support individuals with PTSD. This app (which has been downloaded over 53,000 times in more than 60 countries) is available for free download for both iPhone and Android devices.

"We are energized to build innovative products that extend the reach of VA and DoD services to those who need them most," said Julia Hoffman, PsyD, clinical psychologist and mobile applications lead at VA's National Center for PTSD. Dr. Hoffman and DoD collaborator Robert Ciulla, PhD, accepted the award.

The ATA Innovation award is given to individuals whose ideas "save and improve countless lives, whether their patients are young children, soldiers on the battlefield, returning veterans, or the average American health care consumer," said ATA President Ber-

nard Harris Jr, MD, MBA.

You can read more about the PTSD Coach app by logging on to the VA's National Center for PTSD website, <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/PTSDCoach.asp>.

## PTSD Without Stigma

In an effort to encourage more veterans and service members to get appropriate treatment of PTSD, the military and VA announced in May 2012 that they're changing the way they define and treat PTSD. If effective, this approach could add to the PTSD case backlog. The current definition of PTSD states that the standard victim responds to trauma with "helplessness and fear."

Elsbeth Cameron Ritchie, a former psychiatrist with the U.S. Army, says that although that may be true for civilians, military personnel are trained to do the opposite, "When the IED, the improvised explosive device, goes off, they pick up their weapon, lay down suppressing fire, drag their buddies into safety and go on about doing what they're trained to do."

Elaine Miller-Karas, director of the West Coast-based Trauma Resource Institute says, "There aren't enough therapists in our country to deal with the number of individuals coming back with traumatic stress symptoms."

Miller-Karas asserts that the solution requires more than just finding enough psychiatrists and therapists for all these men and women. It is necessary to find alternative approaches, like relaxation techniques, exercise, and other ways to help people who don't want to be labeled with a disorder. "Many of our young men and women coming back don't want to go to a mental health therapist. But they

will go someplace and learn skills for wellness to increase their resiliency," says Miller-Karas.

## VA Expands Brain Injury Knowledge

In June 2012, the VA announced 2 studies that may help develop new diagnostics, therapeutics, and rehabilitation strategies for treating blast-related traumatic brain injury and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), while improving technology that restores independence and mobility for people with paralysis or limb-loss.

The May 17, 2012, issue of *Nature* published a study about the use of an investigational brain-computer interface system that provided 2 people with paralyzed limbs the power of mind over body. They were able to reach and grasp objects in 3-dimensional space using robotic arms controlled solely by brain activity. This peer-reviewed demonstration is the first of its kind.

Another study in the May 16, 2012, issue of *Science Translational Medicine* details the first cases, confirmed by VA researchers, of CTE in brain tissue from blast-exposed military service personnel. CTE affects the brain and is linked to repeated head trauma causing large accumulations of tau proteins, which kill cells in regions responsible for mood, emotions, and executive thinking. Laboratory experiments demonstrated that exposure to a single blast (ie, a typical improvised explosive device) results in CTE and the long-term impairments that accompany this disease.

"These studies are just the latest examples of the world-class VA research that reaches beyond veterans,"

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said. “As with so much of VA research, the impact will be felt not just through improved care for veterans but for all Americans.”

### Project REACH Developer Challenge Finalists Announced

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On June 5, 2012, VA and Jon Bon Jovi, chairman of the Jon Bon Jovi (JB) Soul Foundation, announced the 5 finalists of Project REACH (Real-Time Electronic Access for Caregivers and the Homeless) during the Health Data Initiative Forum in Washington, DC, sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The VA with the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), HHS, and the JBJ Soul Foundation launched the developer challenge last March.

The JBJ Soul Foundation operates the JBJ Soul Kitchen, a community restaurant in Monmouth County, New Jersey, where competing apps will now be tested. The Project Reach developer challenge was designed to encourage creation of apps that provide real-time information as well as streamline the connection between service providers aiding the homeless.

“To achieve our goal to end veteran homelessness, it is vitally important that we capitalize on innovative ideas from the public and private sector. The developer community has responded quickly and creatively to harness technology to meet the needs of homeless veterans and their providers,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “I am grateful for their hard work on behalf of the nation’s homeless veterans.”

The prize for the 5 finalists is a

\$10,000 cash prize, and they will be able to pilot their mobile applications at the JBJ Soul Kitchen. Project REACH finalists are Robert Damashek and Corey Brown from Binary Group in Arlington, Virginia; John McCarthy from Forest Hills, New York; Jessi Schoenleber and Joe Nicosia from JJ-AppCo, LLC, in Manchester, New Jersey; Joshua Temkin and Jim Homer from Qbase in Reston, Virginia; and Mike McDougall from Makani Kai Tech in Kihei, Hawaii.

### VA Partnership to House 10,000 Homeless Vets in 2012

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In a May 30, 2012, press release, VA announced its intention to collaborate with the “100,000 Homes” Campaign and its 117 participating communities to help find permanent housing for 10,000 vulnerable and chronically homeless veterans this year.

“President Obama and I are personally committed to ending homelessness among veterans,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “Those who have served this nation as veterans should never find themselves on the streets, living without care and without hope.” Shinseki has a goal to end veteran homelessness by 2015.

This collaboration, intended to help accomplish Shinseki’s goal, will support the ongoing work of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and many of the state and local organizations working to implement “Opening Doors,” the federal plan to end chronic and veteran homelessness. The 2011 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress indicated that homelessness among veterans has declined 12% since Jan-

uary 2010. Those seeking more information about the 100,000 Homes Campaign can reach Jake Maguire by phone, 347-266-0175; or e-mail: [jmaguire@cmtysolutions.org](mailto:jmaguire@cmtysolutions.org).

### VA, AHA “Go Red for Women”

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On May 23, 2012, VA and the American Heart Association (AHA) agreed to raise awareness of heart disease and strokes among women veterans and service members as well as wives of veterans and military members.

“This exciting collaboration bolsters VA’s ongoing efforts to prevent cardiovascular disease,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “This is an important issue for women veterans, and we need to do everything we can to address it.”

VA and the AHA’s “Go Red for Women,” supporting the First Lady’s “Joining Forces” Initiative, are collaborating to raise awareness of heart disease—the no. 1 killer of women—among America’s female veterans.

“Currently, 8 million women in the United States are living with heart disease, yet only 1 in 6 American women believes that heart disease is her greatest health threat,” said Dr. Susan Bennett, cardiologist, MedStar Washington Hospital Center and national Go Red for Women spokesperson. “Go Red for Women is excited about our newest strategic alliance with VA because it will provide additional opportunities to increase awareness of women’s no. 1 killer and encourage military women—active, veterans, and military wives—to actively prevent heart attacks and stroke.” If you’re seeking more information, call the VA at 1-800-827-1000, log on to [www.womenshealthva.org](http://www.womenshealthva.org) or [www.goredforwomen.org](http://www.goredforwomen.org), or call 1-888-MY-HEART (1-888-694-3278). ●