

GRAND ROUNDS

Sponsored by: The Division of Epidemiology

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12 PM-1 PM

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Traumatic Brain Injury among Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans: VA Research from Prevention to Rehabilitation

ABSTRACT

Nearly 2.5 million United States (US) service members have been deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan war zones. These wars differ from prior wars in terms of the likelihood of exposure to explosive munitions (such as improvised explosive devices) that can cause both physical injury and psychiatric trauma. Blast-related injuries often involve multiple body systems or organs, including the brain. In fact, because of its prevalence relative to prior US conflicts, traumatic brain injury (TBI) has been labeled the "signature injury" of these wars. Although the rate of TBI in Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans is hard to estimate, survey findings suggest that 15-20% may have sustained a TBI during their deployments. Many of these Veterans also have other injuries as well as overlapping psychiatric disorders.

Not all TBI occurs in the context of combat. Military members also incur TBI before and after deployments, primarily due to motor vehicle crashes (MVCs) or falls. And many of the TBIs that occur during combat deployments have been associated with non-combat sources: approximately 50% of Veterans treated as inpatients for TBI in VA rehabilitation centers were injured in MVCs. The Veterans Health Administration (VA) and other organizations caring for Veterans are treating lifelong injuries and disabilities related to TBIs associated with military service. Prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of these injuries – i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention – are of utmost importance to the VA, as well as to Veterans themselves, their families, the President and Congress, and society as a whole.

Dr. Carlson's research focuses on ways in which the VA can better meet the needs of Iraq and Afghanistan combat Veterans with TBI, from preventing further injuries, to identifying health services needs for acute and rehabilitative care. This presentation will share some of the results of her current work, along with next steps in research as progress is made toward serving those who are injured while serving their country.

Food and drink will not be provided. Please feel free to bring your own lunch to eat during the lecture.