

My program is interested in studying Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who have suffered either a penetrating brain wound or lost consciousness after a blast injury due to the blast itself. It will require Vets or Active Duty soldiers and their spouses to spend about a week here at the NIH undergoing studies of brain function. We are writing the protocol now for Institutional Review Board Approval probably sometime in late Winter and then we will begin to actively recruit. I have studied Vietnam Vets for 30 years and these studies have led to significant improvements in our knowledge about the brain and how to improve our care of Vets. We have published extensively in the scientific literature on our findings. On a personal note, I have never seen such dedication to research as that shown by the Vietnam Vets who participate in our studies, often with no direct benefit for themselves. They just want to contribute. I would be happy to answer any specific or direct question you might have.

Sincerely,

Jordan Grafman

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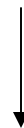
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Mary Ellen contacted Dr. Grafman after reading this article in SK San Diego.

Brain-Injured Vets Decline Faster

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Chief of Cognitive Neuroscience Section at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Dr. Jordan Grafman believes the nearly two-thirds of wounded service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) would benefit from life-long care by VA neurologists and specialists in head injury. After evaluating brain-injured Vietnam veterans more than 35 years after their injuries, Grafman recently revealed that those who suffered penetrating head injuries during the conflict decline with age at a faster rate than their veteran counterparts without brain injuries. Although many service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are diagnosed with mild cases of TBI, Grafman believes in order for veterans to resist early decline they should challenge themselves both mentally and physically as well as receive life-long monitoring from the VA Healthcare System.

In order to preserve their quality of life, it is in the best interest of service members to stay physically fit and intellectually active. In the wake of a brain injury, affected service members should do more work than the average military members. Most veterans suffering from mild TBIs should be able to recognize their difficulties and weaknesses within six months to a year after the injury and yet still lead independent, healthy lives. Even so, it is vital for those who know they have a TBI, no matter how mild, to protect against cognitive decline. The best way for the brain to resist decline is threefold: socialization, intellectual stimulation and physical activity. The strength of the family unit also plays a crucial role, helping veterans excel in these areas and not fall prey to isolation and depression.

Coupled with self-preservation, occasional medical monitoring is also important. There could be a change in the veteran's function later in life due to the original injury and it is vital for the physician not to confuse the decline in function with dementia. Grafman's study also documented cases of Vietnam vets experiencing their first seizure 30 years after the TBI. It is imperative for physicians to monitor veterans with TBI should they experience seizures later in life.

The VA San Diego Healthcare System only sees veterans diagnosed with mild cases of TBI. Although they are often monitored for weeks or months, Dr. John D'Andrea, MD, who oversees the Traumatic Brain Injury screening program, insists there is no timeline or limit to their care. Depending on the evaluation and treatment plan developed by the physician, the patients are seen for as long as they need care, which could be years depending on what the physician deems necessary.

Even with the large percent of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans being diagnosed with TBI, Grafman does not fear a future veteran home pandemic. There are no more reported service members with brain injuries than in any other conflict. Grafman considers the sacrifice service members made on behalf of the country enough to warrant them lifelong care from the VA.

Grafman is recruiting veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan suffering from penetrating head injuries to participate in a new study. To learn more about the study or to participate, contact Grafman at grafmanj@ninds.nih.gov - Erin Murphy