



Defense Health Agency

BIAM Podcast Series: *Picking Your Brain*

Episode 3 “Exploring DVBIC’s Mission Pt. 2”

Featuring: CAPT Pyne, Dr. Joanne Gold, and Erin O’Dell

Host: Kate Perelman

(Kate) The views, opinions, and findings contained in this podcast are those of the host and subject matter experts. They should not be construed as official Department of Defense positions, policies, or decisions unless designated by other official documentation.

Three main branches drive the innovative work of the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center or DVBIC. First, there’s the Research Branch, which we learned about in part one of this episode. The Clinical Affairs and Education Branches are responsible for clinical recommendations that inform the best traumatic brain injury care practices and educational tools to educate medical providers, service members, veterans, and their families.

Recently, there has been a focus on ‘optimal outcomes for health, well-being, and readiness’ within the Defense Health Agency. DVBIC Division Chief, Navy Captain, Scott Pyne summarizes DVBIC’s role in the readiness of service members, and provides an example of the organization’s clinical impact.

(CAPT Pyne) If the Defense Health Agency’s role is to support the warfighter, or to support our active duty service members, we need to make sure that we’re providing them the best care possible in order to enhance their readiness. Because it doesn’t help us if we have a lot of injured service members who aren’t able to serve and complete the missions. So, DVBIC’s role in traumatic brain injury is to optimize the readiness and safely return people to full unlimited activity duty. I have a colleague of mine, currently deployed...run into a number of folks who sustained acute concussions. She has been able to use the experience and materials that DVBIC provides through its website and actually provided updates to clinicians, service members, and leaders during her deployment, and we were so glad that we were able to share those things with her. I think for every one of these providers that, that we do reach, you know, I wonder how many we don’t.... This has been one of the things that I’ve enjoyed doing the most, and I hope to be able to expand this during my time at DVBIC is to talk to a colleague who is doing something and then know another colleague in the Department of Defense is doing the exact same thing. And I can link them up together so they can share ideas, so they can provide better clinical care. One of the things that DVBIC has done of late is take many of our clinical tools that we’ve developed and actually study them. So the tools are based on the state-of-the-science, which is current research, but then not only do we create the tool, but we throw it out there for the providers to use, and then we evaluate the effectiveness of its use. That’s been very helpful.

(Kate) Clinical investigations that focus on the care of the patient are very important to DVBIC. Neuroscience Clinician Dr. Joanne Gold explains...

(Dr. Joanne Gold) ... And then once that research is conducted, you really want to make sure that you are focused on what we call “patient-oriented evidence that matters.” So you tailor your research questions to address an answer to that end, to make sure that whatever you’re researching the question



Defense Health Agency

that you're asking, will ultimately benefit a patient. So we actually have a clinical translation team that meets once a month to really try to discuss how we take what we're finding in the research, implement it into a clinical tool, and then get that out to the field so they can use it to actually impact patient care.

(Kate) The Comprehensive Strategy and Action Plan for Warfighter Brain Health, which we heard a lot about in part one of this episode, illustrates the importance of education in eliminating any stigma attached to TBI. DVBIC's Education Branch provides evidence-based information about TBI prevention, recognition, and recovery through its online resources. The branch also conducts TBI outreach and training to different stakeholder populations through its Regional Education Coordinators, or RECs, and its A Head for the Future initiative. These work to increase awareness about how to prevent and reduce the consequences of mild-to-severe TBI. Erin O'Dell is an REC based out of Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

(Erin O'Dell) The education coordinators are responsible for promoting DVBIC and TBI awareness kind of throughout the VA system and the DoD systems. So we educate service members their family members and the providers that care for them on TBI awareness. Depending on the audience, we kind of tailor our presentations to them. But we really do kind of a basic overview of TBI for everyone. So we discussed the statistics of it, kind of when they're happening, how they're happening, who's most susceptible to them. Definitely reference the civilian population as well, so they can get an idea of the numbers difference, whether it's different for active duty or the civilian side.

(Kate) What is your goal in educating people about DVBIC products?

(Erin O'Dell) So just letting people know that they're out there is, you know, the most important thing and then kind of making sure that I gather enough information from who I'm speaking with, to gear them towards the right products that DVBIC has because there's so many of them... But if we can get, you know, some of the specific symptoms fact sheets out, or, you know, maybe for parents who have had a child who's had a concussion playing sports or something, direct them towards the family line and caregivers, especially. You know, that line is extensive and it's, it's absolutely brilliant, the way they put it together and simplified... An example of that would be, I guess, the majority of the time, a lot of the time, I'm directing the active duty service members towards the PTSD TBI fact sheet. Because there seems to be a lot of confusion or misconceptions about what exactly TBI is, and what exactly PTSD is, how the symptoms kind of overlap, and then what the differences and the symptoms are, so ... I definitely like to share kind of across the board that the stigmas that are associated with TBI as being a career-ending diagnosis are not, not true. Yes, it can affect, you know, your career and your progress. And it may, may stand, put it at a standstill for just a little bit until you get healed. But I also like to let everyone know that concussion is a recoverable injury, especially if you get the proper care right in the beginning, you know that that average recovery time tends to be about two weeks. So that tends to put some of the active duty guys in more of a comfortable position that where, okay, well I may have to rest for two weeks but I'll be ready to go after that. So that that's definitely the message in the story that I, I like to push across the board and share with, you know, other service members the ease that others have felt after having the conversation.



(Kate) Why do you think Brain Injury Awareness Month matters?

(Erin O'Dell) Just getting the message out there that you know, TBI is in fact, an injury. You know, it's it's kind of that unspoken about, unknown kind of injury because you can't see it. So I think just getting the message out there and making people aware that TBI is an injury that it can be, you know, severe but it can also be something that you recover from fairly easily with the right care is important.

(Kate) The Research, Clinical and Education Branches of DVBIC, help drive its mission to improve TBI treatment for service members, veterans, and their families. DVBIC continues to advance evidence-based approaches to support clinical care and educate medical providers with the central aim to return those who sustained a TBI to the highest level of function possible. For more information on the studies, clinical, or educational tools featured in this episode, please visit our website at dvbic.dcoe.mil. That's d- v-b-i-c dot d-c-o-e dot mil. We'll also have a link in the episode description.

Picking Your Brain is a four-part series from the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center that focuses on the care and recovery of service members and veterans who have sustained a TBI. It was produced and edited by Vinnie White and was hosted today by me, Kate Perelman. Special thanks to Dr. Rosser Mathews for his help in writing this episode. In the final episode of *Picking Your Brain*, I'll interview DVBIC Division Chief, Navy CAPT Scott Pyne, and explore the importance of caregivers in the TBI recovery process.