



Defense Health Agency

Brain Injury Awareness Month Podcast Series: *Picking Your Brain*

Trailer - Featuring Dr. Joanne Gold

Host: Kate Perelman

(Kate) Welcome to Picking Your Brain a four-part series that profiles the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, otherwise known as DVBIC. My name is Kate Perelman, and I work in communications here at DVBIC.

In observance of Brain Injury Awareness Month, I wanted to share with you how traumatic brain injury or TBI is a serious health issue that affects service members and veterans while deployed and here at home. Sustaining a TBI can cause physical, cognitive and behavioral changes that can be difficult to adapt to. These changes are usually temporary, but in moderate to severe cases of TBI recovery can become a lifelong process for both service members and their families. So what is a TBI? A TBI is a blow or jolt to the head that disrupts the normal function of your brain. It may cause someone to lose consciousness briefly or for an extended period of time. It could even make someone so confused that they see stars.

According to a study from this year, 380,000 services members from 2000 to 2017 were diagnosed with a TBI, with 82% of the cases classified as mild. DVBIC reports that a majority of sustained TBI's are classified as mild, or otherwise known as a concussion. A mild TBI is where service members were confused or disoriented, lost consciousness for up to 30-minutes or suffered memory loss lasting less than 24-hours. DVBIC's primary concern is conducting cutting edge TBI research that improves the quality of care for service members and veterans who have sustained a TBI. They also engage in community outreach and educational activities tailored toward empowering families and caregivers.

All of this clinical investigation and education then go to the development of clinical guidelines for the medical treatment of TBI. This is why DVBIC has been appointed as the TBI Center of Excellence for the Department of Defense or DoD. I wanted to get a better understanding of TBI. So I sat down with Dr. Joanne Gold from DVBIC.

(Dr. Gold) I am a neuroscience clinician in the clinical practice and clinical recommendations section. And our ultimate role is really to provide guidance and support to people providers and patients through the development and implementation of clinical tools and providing patient education information. I think everyone kind of has a story about how they kind of got involved in TBI actually suffered a TBI myself garrison. Yeah, my last year in the Air Force. And once I was out, I applied for a job at DVBIC. Because I wanted to make this process easier for other people.

(Kate) What are the symptoms and signs that both the service member is experiencing and the ones that are seen from the outside, what the family or colleagues see?

(Dr. Gold) Sure. So the service member themselves probably experienced headaches, that's the most common sleep disturbances, dizziness, vestibular issues, vision disturbances even and then cognitive dysfunction they have might have slowed thinking or trouble with concentration. And a lot of those aren't really visible to others. I think what people would probably notice first is that, you know, they're just maybe a little bit withdrawn, they're not performing to their potential that they were before. It won't be something that's overtly visible. It was really difficult for other people to understand even in the medical community, which was really frustrating for me.



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(Kate) What advice would you give a service member of veteran who may have recently experienced a TBI?

(Dr. Gold) Sure, so I'll say this because you know, do as I say, not as I do, you have to be an advocate for yourself. You really do, and if you know in your heart of hearts you're not advocate, because I was not tell someone that can help you be an advocate. And I just think it's the nature of trying to do a job that requires so much of you. And the fact that we're predisposed to put ourselves last. Go talk to somebody you need that check, you need someone to look out for you.

(Kate) As Dr. Gold stated, it's important for service members to be advocates for themselves and their troops as TBI directly impacts the health and safety of those who serve. In this podcast series, you'll hear stories of active duty service members and veterans who have dealt with TBI and its challenges. You'll hear from clinical investigators who are on the front lines to better understand the issues that contribute to TBI. You'll also hear stories of family members and caregivers who help their loved ones along the path to recovery.

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. Look for episodes this Brain Injury Awareness Month, March 2020.