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## Press Release

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### **JHQVAMC Researcher Awarded \$1M VHA Grant to Study PTSD**

MOUNTAIN HOME, TN— Dr. Justin Gass, a research psychologist at James H. Quillen VA Medical Center and an associate professor at the East Tennessee State University College of Medicine’s Department of Biological Sciences, was awarded a research grant January 1, 2022, to help combat the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) coupled with Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD).

Dr. Gass said the \$1,095,243.00 grant will be used to investigate the brain changes associated with PTSD/AUD comorbidity using state-of-the-art laboratory techniques to examine the brain mechanisms involved in the high rates of co-occurring alcohol abuse and PTSD in the Veteran population.

PTSD and AUD are two of the most common mental health disorders and often occur together. The incidence rate of PTSD is significantly greater in the Veteran population. Even worse, Veterans with PTSD are almost twice as likely to develop issues with alcohol abuse and AUD.

“Research has shown that the brain areas associated with PTSD and drug addiction have many similarities,” said Dr. Gass. “As a result, there is evidence that PTSD symptoms contribute to the development of alcoholism. Furthermore, alcohol abuse interferes with the treatment of PTSD. There is a need to better understand how the brain is changed in this disorder.”

Dr. Gass will determine how “risky” behavior, a symptom often observed in individuals with PTSD and AUD, contributes to deficits in their normal behavior. He also will examine multiple brain areas to determine those that are most likely to be damaged in the PTSD/AUD population.

By combining the results of these experiments, Dr. Gass hopes to create new behavioral and pharmacological treatments that can better serve Veterans who suffer from these debilitating disorders.

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*Note: One-on-one media interviews with Dr. Gass are welcomed and can be arranged by contacting the Public Affairs Officer at 926-1171 ext. 7126 or [Joshua.Higgins@va.gov](mailto:Joshua.Higgins@va.gov).*