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VA-led Consortium Launches Brain Bank for Research on PTSD

WASHINGTON - A consortium led by the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has launched the first brain tissue biorepository (also known as a "brain bank") – to support research on the causes, progression and treatment of PTSD affecting Veterans.

The national brain bank will follow the health of enrolled participants during their lifetime. Participants in the brain bank will donate their brain and other body tissue after their death. The donated tissue, along with each Veteran's health information, will provide crucial information for use in research on PTSD and related disorders.

"Although we have learned a great deal about abnormalities in brain structure and function from brain imaging research, there is no substitute for looking at the neurons themselves," said consortium director Dr. Matthew Friedman. "Understanding the cellular and circuit contributions to abnormal brain activity in PTSD is critical in the search for potential biomarkers of susceptibility, illness and treatment response and for developing new treatments targeting the conditions at the cellular level."

Dr. Friedman also is the founder of the national brain bank, and former Executive Director and current Senior Advisor to the National Center for PTSD. The national brain bank will investigate the impact of stress, trauma and PTSD on brain tissue in order to advance the scientific knowledge of PTSD, particularly the identification of PTSD biomarkers. Participating sites are located at VA medical centers in Boston, Massachusetts, San Antonio, Texas, West Haven, Connecticut, and White River Junction, Vermont, along with the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences at Bethesda, Maryland (USUHS).

PTSD is a significant mental health concern among Veterans. In 2013, 533,720 Veterans with primary or secondary diagnosis of PTSD received treatment at VA medical centers and clinics. PTSD is a serious mental disorder resulting from exposure to direct or indirect threat of death, serious injury or physical violence, including sexual violence.

The national brain bank is seeking Veterans with PTSD to participate in research about PTSD that affects Veterans. Veterans without PTSD are also eligible to participate in the brain bank because it is important to study Veterans without PTSD to compare the impact of stress, trauma and PTSD on brain tissue. Veterans interested in learning more about enrolling in the brain bank are encouraged to call its toll-free number 1-800-762-6609 or visit its website http://www.research.va.gov/programs/tissue_banking/PTSD/default.cfm

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