Traumatic Brain Injury in the Defense Department

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Disclosures

- The presenter has no relevant financial relationships to disclose.
- The views expressed in this presentation are her own and do not reflect the official policy of the DoD or the U.S. government.
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Objectives

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Apply targeted strategies to facilitate interactions with a Service member or veteran with TBI and family members/caregivers
- Provide Defense and Veterans Brain Injury center (DVBIC) educational products and other TBI resources to Service members, veterans and family members/caregivers
What is a Traumatic Brain Injury?

A blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain.

Two conditions must be met to suspect/diagnose a TBI
1. Injury event that affects the brain
2. A new onset or worsening of any of the following immediately after the event:
   - Any loss of consciousness (LOC)
   - Any alteration in consciousness (AOC): i.e., dazed, confused
   - Posttraumatic amnesia (PTA)
TBI Severity

Mild TBI/Concussion
- LOC: 30 minutes or less
- Amnesia up to 24 hours
- Alteration of consciousness lasting less than 24 hours

Moderate TBI
- LOC: more than 30 minutes, but less than 24 hours
- Amnesia lasting for more than 24 hours and less than seven days
- Alteration of consciousness lasting equal to or more than 24 hours

Severe TBI
- LOC: more than 24 hours
- Amnesia lasting for more than seven days
- Alteration of consciousness lasting more than 24 hours

Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs), 2015.
Causes of TBI in the DoD

Leading causes of mild TBI in deployed and non-deployed settings:

- Motor vehicles – crashes and roll overs
- Falls
- Being stuck by or against an object
- Intentional “assaults” unrelated to war
- Battle injuries

(Medical Surveillance Monthly Report, 2013)
TBI Facts

- Over 80 percent of all TBIs are diagnosed in the non-deployed setting
- Over 80 percent of TBIs are diagnosed as mild
- A Service member or veteran with a TBI, diagnosed with other psychological and/or physical conditions, may have a more challenging road to recovery
- Individuals with multiple concussions are at risk for prolonged recovery period
- Men between the ages of 18 and 24 are at greatest risk for TBI

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015; DVBIC, 2017)
Common Physical Signs and Symptoms Following TBI

- Headaches: New or worsened
- Sleep disturbances
- Visual disturbances: Blurred or double vision
- Fatigue: Feeling tired, irritable
- Dizziness: Feeling light-headed, off-balance
- Sensitivity to light and/or noise
- Ringing in the ears
- Nausea or vomiting
- Disorders of taste and smell
TBI: Cognitive, Behavioral and Emotional Signs and Symptoms

**Cognition and Memory**
- Poor concentration/working memory
- Temporary gaps in memory
- Slow processing speed
- Decreased awareness of deficits
- Decreased problem solving
- Decreased judgment
- Difficulty finding words

**Behavior**
- Apathy and lacking motivation
- Agitation, aggression
- Personality changes
- Less empathy and concern
- Impulse control: Loss or reduction of inhibition

**Emotion and Affect**
- Anxiety, depression, emotional liability
- Irritability
- Mood swings
- Poor self-image

Courtesy photo: DVIDS
Potential Complications to Recovery

TBI with Lingering Symptoms and Co-occurring Conditions

- PTSD
- Alcohol or drug use/misuse
- Headaches
- Pain
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Poor concentration
- Memory problems
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- A history of multiple concussions

Illustration by Melanie Florencio-Sexton
Communicating with Patients

Create an environment that facilitates effective communication

- Reserve a quiet private room for each meeting
- Minimal distractions (fans, computer/phone alerts)
- Dim lighting
- Comfortable seating
- Confirm Service member is seated comfortably in a quiet space if meeting is taking place over the phone

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Communicating with Patients

- Email a list of items to be discussed prior to the meeting so the Service member can begin to think about feedback and questions
- Encourage a family member/caregiver or buddy to accompany Service member to appointments
- Encourage consistent use of memory aides (smartphone calendar, journal, etc.)
- Have extra pens and notebooks handy in case they would like to take notes
- Repeat information as needed
- Focus on one thing or task at a time
- Discuss most important items first when concentration is likely at its best
- Avoid information overload and distractions
- Email a list of topics discussed and resources provided when appointment is complete

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Communicating with Family/Caregiver

Include family members/caregiver in discussions. Service member may have difficulty understanding and following directions.

- Evaluate family and caregiver support resources:
  - Factor in home environment
  - Age
  - Employment
  - Other family obligations

- Caregivers need support, information and resources, too:
  - Peer support and counseling
  - TBI education
  - Caregiver coaching
Helpful Tips for Recovery Care Coordinators

- Communicate with your colleagues! Lead Coordinator, case manager, TBI recovery support specialists, others
- Consider environmental impacts on the person's ability to function (e.g., noise, quiet, busy, temperature, social, light)
- Include family/caregiver in decision making and discussions
- Consider possible lack of insight and give realistic feedback
- Set professional boundaries between you and the Service member
Helpful Tips for Recovery Care Coordinators

- Provide clear expectations and positive feedback for desirable and appropriate behavior
- Encourage a break when frustration is evident
- Recognize the person may use negative comments or refusal as a means of control
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of actions and decisions
- Encourage journaling of symptoms (date/frequency/severity) to make recall smoother when meeting with medical providers
- As patient transitions, talk about changes in the environment that may be needed and connect with military, veteran, civilian and community resources that are available, as appropriate
Services Provided by DVBIC
TBI Recovery Support Program

**Focus:** TBI expertise, resources and support facilitating connections across the continuum of recovery and spectrum of care.

TBI recovery specialists establish ongoing relationship with client to ensure connection to both clinical and non-clinical care and resources.

- Provide support, advice, advocacy and education
- Identify local resources and programs
- Track symptoms and monitor treatment compliance and outcomes
- Conduct regular follow-up interviews

**Eligibility:** Service members (including National Guard and Reserves) who require transition assistance and veterans who have sustained a TBI, regardless of discharge status, where or when injuries occurred, or their family members or caregivers.

- For more information or to make a referral, email: mrmc.dcoe.TBIrecoverysupport@mail.mil
DVBIC Network Sites

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DVBIC Resources: Tools for the RCC

DVBIC provides free resources on TBI to help Service members, veterans, family members/caregivers and heath care providers

Educational materials, fact sheets, clinical recommendations and much more

dvbic.dcoe.mil/resources
TBI and Psychological Health Resource Catalogs

DCoE Resource Guide
dcoe.mil/about/dcoe-resources

Mobile Applications/Websites for Psychological Health and TBI
t2health.dcoe.mil/t2-app-guide

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DVBIC FACT SHEETS

Information on TBI – symptom management, awareness and prevention, family/caregiver resources and more

TBI Symptom Management

- Headache Management
- Help with Ongoing Symptoms
- Neck Pain Management
- Head injury and Dizziness
- Improving Memory
- Changes in Mood, Personality or Behavior
- Healthy Sleep
Information about the similarities and differences of TBI and PTSD symptoms

Guidelines for graded and gradual return to physical and cognitive activities over the recovery period

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Family Member & Caregiver Resources


- Source of information and support for caregivers of Service members and veterans who have sustained a moderate, severe or penetrating TBI

Center of Excellence for Medical Multimedia (CEMM) – Traumatic Brain Injury

- Interactive education programs for patients, family members and caregivers
  [https://tbi.cemmlibrary.org](https://tbi.cemmlibrary.org)

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Family Member & Caregiver Resources

Family Needs Product Line

- Addressing Family Needs
- Talking with Children About Moderate or Severe TBI
- Talking with Children About TBI
- Taking Care of Yourself While Caring for Others
- A Parent's Guide to Returning Your Child to School

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Mobile Applications

LifeArmor
Touch-screen technology allows the user to browse information on 17 topics, including sleep, depression, relationship issues, and post-traumatic stress. Brief self-assessments help the user measure and track their symptoms, and tools are available to assist with managing specific problems.
http://t2health.dcoe.mil/apps/lifearmor

Mindfulness Coach
Detailed walkthroughs for nine forms of mindfulness meditation with each including voice-guided sessions with captions and instructions for self-guided sessions, and a session log for tracking mindfulness practice.

http://t2health.dcoe.mil/apps/MindfulnessCoach
DCoE Outreach Center

- Dedicated exclusively to psychological health and TBI concerns
- Professional resource consultants available to Service members, veterans, military families, health care providers, researchers and the general public
- Open 24/7
- Collaborative relationships with other DoD and VA hotlines and resource centers

Phone: 866-966-1020
Email: resources@dcoeoutreach.org
Online chat: realwarriors.net/livechat

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Resources

dcoe.mil

dvbic.dcoe.mil

dvbic.dcoe.mil/resources

pdhealth.mil

t2health.dcoe.mil

https://tbi.cemmlibrary.org

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References


