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For immediate release

DoD, VA approve \$45 million in the quest for a PTSD cure

Award to be managed by the UT Health Science Center San Antonio and the VA National Center for PTSD, leaders of the national PTSD research consortium

SAN ANTONIO (Aug. 12, 2013) — In an unprecedented show of support for our nation’s wounded warriors, the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs have agreed to provide approximately \$45 million over five years for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) research to advance PTSD diagnosis, prevention and treatment for service members and veterans. The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and the VA National Center for PTSD lead the consortium, announced over the weekend by the White House and DoD and VA officials.

The STRONG STAR Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (STRONG STAR-CAP) will provide an array of cutting-edge clinical treatment trials and biological studies for active military and veterans with PTSD and related conditions, said STRONG STAR-CAP Consortium Director Alan L. Peterson, Ph.D., professor of psychiatry in the School of Medicine at the UT Health Science Center San Antonio. The consortium’s initiatives will include efforts to learn more about the biology/physiology of PTSD development and treatment response to inform diagnosis, prediction of disease outcome, and new or improved treatment methods.

“Historically, PTSD has been considered to be a chronic, lifelong disorder that is difficult to treat, particularly in military combat veterans,” Dr. Peterson said. “However, results of studies of PTSD in

civilian populations demonstrate that a large percentage of patients have been able to be treated to the point of remission or recovery. Although the term 'cured' is rarely used in reference to PTSD, we believe it is possible.”

Many critical questions remain unanswered, said STRONG STAR-CAP Co-Director Terence Keane, Ph.D., of the VA Boston Healthcare System, the National Center for PTSD and Boston University. “Is combat-related PTSD uniquely different and more difficult to treat?” he asked. “Would outcomes improve with early interventions delivered soon after trauma exposure? Can combat-related PTSD be cured? Few national health crises are more deserving of the greatest efforts of the world’s top scientists to answer these questions.”

STRONG STAR-CAP clinical trials will be conducted to develop programs to treat the largest percentage of service members possible to the point of remission or recovery so that they can remain operationally and functionally fit for military service. The clinical trials will also recruit prior-service veterans to allow them to regain their full potential for social and occupational functioning.

Although the majority of service members who are exposed to traumatic events during the course of duty do not go on to develop clinical symptoms that impair functioning, research shows that an estimated 14 percent of members and veterans who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan developed symptoms that are significant enough to result in a clinical diagnosis of PTSD. More than 2 million U.S. military personnel have deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn; therefore, an estimated 250,000 service members could be diagnosed with PTSD, resulting in a large financial and personal cost to their families, the Department of Defense, the VA and the nation.

“Our goal is to treat veterans with PTSD to remission. To set our sights any lower would be a disservice to our military warriors, their families and our nation,” Dr. Peterson said. “Those who have fought so hard and sacrificed so much deserve the best our nation can give.”

Additionally, because an estimated 7 percent of the civilian population will develop PTSD at some point, treatment advances made through STRONG STAR-CAP could be applied to help millions more Americans gain a new lease on life.

STRONG STAR-CAP has assembled an unprecedented collaboration of highly qualified researchers and clinicians with expertise in PTSD, neuroscience, genetics, traumatic brain injury, suicide, research in military settings, and comorbid conditions such as depression, pain, sleep

disturbances and substance abuse. The group includes military clinicians with “boots on the ground” experience in assessing and treating combat-related PTSD. This includes Dr. Peterson himself, a retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel and clinical psychologist who assisted service members suffering PTSD symptoms on the battlefields of Iraq.

STRONG STAR (South Texas Research Organizational Network Guiding Studies on Trauma and Resilience) was initially funded in 2008 by the Department of Defense’s Office of Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), part of the U.S. Army’s Medical Research and Materiel Command. For STRONG STAR-CAP, the original STRONG STAR consortium has partnered with the seven divisions of the National Center for PTSD and other VA, military and civilian investigators and institutions across the world to form the largest research consortium in history dedicated to the alleviation of combat-related PTSD.

The Department of Defense plans to award approximately \$20.3 million to the UT Health Science Center San Antonio as coordinating center for STRONG STAR-CAP. The Department of Veterans Affairs has committed to provide up to \$25 million over five years for the consortium. Funds added by the VA will only be utilized to support research at VA sites; such funding will be managed by the VA Office of Research and Development.

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The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, one of the country’s leading health sciences universities, ranks in the top 3 percent of all institutions worldwide receiving National Institutes of Health funding. The university’s schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry, health professions and graduate biomedical sciences have produced approximately 28,000 graduates. The \$736 million operating budget supports eight campuses in San Antonio, Laredo, Harlingen and Edinburg. For more information on the many ways “*We make lives better*®,” visit www.uthscsa.edu.

The South Texas Research Organizational Network Guiding Studies on Trauma and Resilience, or STRONG STAR, is a multidisciplinary and multi-institutional research consortium funded by the U.S. Department of Defense’s Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program to develop and evaluate the most effective early interventions possible for the detection, prevention and treatment of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in active-duty military personnel and recently discharged veterans. Under the leadership of The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and based in South-Central Texas, the STRONG STAR Consortium brings together the expertise of a world-class team of military, civilian and VA institutions and investigators and one of the largest populations of active-duty and recently discharged Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation New Dawn combat veterans in the nation. With the critical mass of talent required to make major scientific advances in military PTSD research, STRONG STAR investigators hope to improve countless lives by

preventing the development of chronic PTSD in a new generation of veterans. For more information, visit www.strongstar.org.

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The mission of the National Center for PTSD is to advance the clinical care and social welfare of America's Veterans and others who have experienced trauma, or who suffer from PTSD, through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders. The National Center has emerged as the world's leading research and educational center of excellence on PTSD. Its vision is to be the foremost leader in information on PTSD and trauma; information generated internally through its extensive research program, and information synthesized from published scientific research and collective clinical experience that is efficiently disseminated to the field. The Center is organized to facilitate rapid translation of science into practice, assuring that the latest research findings inform clinical care; and translation of practice into science, assuring that questions raised by clinical challenges are addressed using rigorous experimental protocols.