

BrainLine.org Confronts Traumatic Brain Injury Crisis

WETA Launches National Multimedia Project Aimed at Preventing, Treating and Living with “Invisible” Injuries

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ARLINGTON, VA — Every 21 seconds someone somewhere in America sustains a traumatic brain injury. That doesn't include the more than 19 percent of military personnel returning from combat duty in Iraq who may also have sustained mild to severe brain trauma.

“The numbers are simply staggering,” said Dr. Carl Valenziano, director of trauma at St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center in Paterson, N.J. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified traumatic brain injury as rising to national crisis levels. While the care of TBI in our military has received a lot of media attention, there is a need to increase discussion about how to prevent brain injuries, treat brain injuries or live with brain injuries among the general public— whether you've sustained the injury yourself or are caring for a family member or friend,” said the trauma surgeon with more than 20 years in the field.

Recognizing this national need, WETA, the flagship public broadcasting station in the nation's capital, in partnership with the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, is launching BrainLine.org.

The site features video webcasts, recent research, personal stories, and articles on living with, treating and preventing traumatic brain injuries. On Nov. 7, BrainLine.org hosted a live webinar featuring former WWE professional wrestler-turned-researcher Christopher Nowinski, who discussed sports-related brain injuries.

“Up to this point, much of the information available online was very clinical and difficult to find,” said BrainLine.org executive director Noel Gunther. “We wanted to present valuable information in easy to understand language that anyone – a service member, a mother, a teenager – could use because these injuries are having a huge impact on a large and growing segment of our country.”

An estimated 1.4 million Americans sustain a traumatic brain injury each year from incidents involving motor vehicle crashes, bicyclist or pedestrian injuries, falls, sports-related accidents, and injuries due to physical abuse and violence. Among those most at risk for traumatic brain injury are children, late teens and older adults.

Lesley LeMasurier was 19 years old when she suffered a concussion that ended her chances for a spot on the U.S. Ski team – it was her fifth traumatic brain injury.

“I didn't know anything about the brain or brain injuries. I didn't know how serious a risk I was running. I was just a kid trying to chase a dream and didn't know I was hurting myself in the process.”

In the years leading up to her final competition, LeMasurier suffered daily migraines, nausea, weakness on her left side and loss of balance. Still, she says, she felt pressure from all sides to compete.

“I feel like traumatic brain injuries are downplayed, especially among athletes,” LeMasurier said. “If there is no break or no blood you just keep going. I never pointed to my brain and said there was something wrong with it.”

Traumatic brain injuries are also taking a toll on military members fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, 28 percent of battle-injured soldiers admitted to Walter Reed Army Medical Center have sustained a traumatic brain injury. Most often, the injuries are caused by improvised explosive devices. Improvements in field medicine mean more service members survive wounds that would have killed them in previous wars, but that also means dealing with this new, largely invisible disability.

Whether on the battlefield or at home, a brain injury can be life altering. Depression, memory loss, debilitating headaches and erratic behavior can often persist for months or years after an injury. But patients are often sent home from emergency rooms without referrals to services or follow-up care. That leaves families scrambling for information.

Today, LeMasurier, a senior at the University of Colorado, is working with BrainLine.org and other organizations to raise awareness of the long-term damage traumatic brain injuries can cause.

BrainLine.org explains what treatment people with brain injuries should receive and what kind of support they will need to begin their new lives. The resources BrainLine.org offers provide those living with TBI a 24-hour network of support.

BrainLine.org is a national multimedia project produced by WETA, the public TV and radio station in Washington, D.C. The project is funded the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, the primary operational TBI component of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, through a subcontract award with the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine

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*For more information,
visit www.BrainLine.org*