

# USD Researches PTSD Affecting Vets

**BY RANDY DOCKENDORF**  
randy.dockendorf@yankton.n  
et

For many combat veterans, the battle doesn't end when they return home.

They find themselves torn between the war they left behind — or can't leave behind — and trying to deal with family, jobs and other issues on the homefront.

And often, no one else seems to understand them or their situation.

Now, University of South Dakota researchers at Vermillion are seeking new insights into the complex issues surrounding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Drs. Jeffrey Simons and Raluca Gaher of the USD psychology department are part of the multidisciplinary study. The project is made possible by a \$1.7 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The grant will cover equipment, salaries and reimbursement for participants.

The study focuses on Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans, Simons said. The ultimate goal of the researchers is to improve care for the country's newest generation of veterans.

"It's a rolling experiment over four years. We are following a particular subject for 18 months," he said. "By time we are done, we will have followed 250 people over the four-year period."

The research is being conducted with partners at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Sioux Falls and the Veteran Health Care

System in Bay Pines, Fla. Simons and Gaher are also working with a behavioral geneticist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, an electrochemical engineering firm in Boston and a leading expert in longitudinal modeling at the University of California-Davis.

The researchers are studying the link between traumatic stress and health, Simons said.

"The subjects give us a saliva sample for the genetics study, which is related to specific neurotransmitters in the brain," he said. "It's not like there's a gene for PTSD. It's more related to reactivity and control. We are looking at self-regulation and emotions."

The researchers are also studying a veteran's surroundings. They are examining social, psychological and environmental factors. In turn, those factors contribute to individual differences in resilience and vulnerability. "Some of what we do tries to look at what extent someone is isolated or in supportive — and non-supportive — relationships," Simons said.

The project uses advanced data collection, including real-time monitoring of veterans' behavior with palmtop computers.

"We get assessments of their behavior on a day-to-day basis," he said. "We understand the factors that contribute to their patterns of good days and bad days. We understand the factors that lead to positive growth over time."

Using the palmtop computers, the veterans answer specific questions on a variety of topics,



Two men discuss issues during the eighth annual veterans' supper in Vermillion. The community program, held last week at the Eagles Club, provided veterans and current military members with camaraderie as well as a meal.

(Photo by Randy Dockendorf/P&D)

Simons said.

"We have a whole series of questions that provide a rating to their various moods, and we ask about their symptoms," he said. "It's programmed to ask them questions at a random time throughout the day, and it records data. We are able to quantify things."

The veterans are asked about their experiences at the moment, Simons said.

"We start off asking where the person is at in a given point in time. Are they at work or at home? What is their social environment like?"

Whether they are with people or not?" he said. "We also ask questions about experiences that might have reminded them of the war."

The real-time information, along with the randomness of the calls, provide a much clearer picture than asking veterans to remember past moods, Simons said.

"People have all kinds of biases in how they recall information. If you ask them today, 'How was your week?', in part they will be influenced by how they are today," he said. "By knowing how they are feeling in each point in time, we can quantify it as opposed to getting your perceptions about a more remote time."

After one to two weeks, the South Dakota veterans come to the USD campus in Vermillion or to a VA office in Sioux Falls to download their data. The veterans are also interviewed, giving researchers a chance for face-to-face interaction.

The Florida veterans visit offices in their state, Simons said, noting Gaher has contacts among the Florida researchers.

"By having both South Dakota and Florida, we have a wider variety of subjects and we're able to

have a sufficient number of people," Simons said. "It's more inclusive and adds to the study."

The researchers will start recruiting subjects in the near future, Simons said.

"We have referrals from within the VA system and are also using advertisements and local media," he said. "Another way is we try to access various veterans groups directly. We're trying to cast a wide net."

The study will hopefully create better awareness of PTSD, defined as a reaction to severe stress, Simons said. In that respect, the research can create a wide-ranging impact for future generations.

"This study will help veterans not only now but in the future," Simons said.

## USD musicians shine at competition

Four musicians from the University of South Dakota showcased their talents at the South Dakota Music Teachers Association (SDMTA) Conference at Spearfish, Nov. 1-2.


Adrian Ries of Elk Point, a senior piano performance major and a student of Professor Susan Keith Gray, D.M.A., was a first place performer in the MTNA Steinway & Sons Young Artist Piano Competition, which is held in conjunction with the SDMTA. Ries qualified for regionals to be held in Lawrence, KS, in January.

Laura Bertschinger, a graduate student in vocal performance, finished in second place in the MTNA Young Artist Voice Competition. A Creighton, NE, native, Bertschinger is the alternate for the January regional competition in Kansas. She is a student of Voice Professor Tracelyn Gesteland, D.M.A.

Blake Proehl, a sophomore piano performance major from Parkston, received first place in the SDMTA collegiate piano competition while Jared Mogen, a junior music education major from Sioux Falls, received honorable mention honors in the SDMTA sponsored voice competition. Proehl is a student of Professor Susan Keith Gray while Mogen studies with Brandon Hendrickson, D.M.A., assistant professor of voice.

The SDMTA Conference featured students from USD, South Dakota State University, Augustana College, Black Hills State University and the University of Sioux Falls. SDMTA was founded in 1955 by a group of educators across the state to improve the standards of teaching music and is an affiliate of Music Teachers National Association. Members teach piano, organ, voice, strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion to individuals or to small groups. Any music professional or college music student is invited to join.


## See Your PA, Same Day.




Vermillion Medical Clinic, P.C. is pleased to announce the association of Amy M. Fluit, MPAS, PA-C. Fluit specializes in the practice of Family Medicine. She is a graduate of the University of South Dakota Physician Assistant Studies Program, Vermillion, SD.


Amy comes to the Vermillion Medical Clinic after serving as a PA in an OB/GYN clinic. The clinic welcomes her to our team of care. She will assist Drs. Dendinger and Yelverton; and Michelle Chaussee, MPAS, PA-C in providing comprehensive primary care to patients of all ages.

Please join us in welcoming Amy, her husband Justin, and their children, Frankie, Henry, and Eddie.



**M-F: 5pm to 9pm**





**VERMILLION MEDICAL CLINIC®**  
101 South Plum Street • Vermillion, SD 57069  
www.vermillionmedicalclinic.com • 605-624-8643  
**M-F: 8am to 5pm**

**So Much Care, So Close to Home.**

### WANTED

**Buying all types of SCRAP IRON**  
Farm Machinery • Cars & Trucks  
References Available • Top Market Prices Paid  
Home: 402-945-1512 • Cell: 402-533-3640  
**K&K Iron & Metal**



### INDOOR STORAGE RENT/LEASE

South Hwy. 81, Norfolk.  
Former Arkfeld Manufacturing building

- Up to 50,000 square feet; Will divide
- Large overhead doors
- Loading dock
- Front office space available
- Lease Price Negotiable
- Climate Controlled
- Will remodel to suit

Hurry!  
Only 25,000 sq. ft. remaining

Contact Brian 402-598-0642

## midwest GOLD-SILVER

### Convert Your Unwanted Gold & Silver & Receive Your Cash Today

- Coins-Gold, Silver & Platinum
- Bullion-Gold, Silver & Platinum
- Silver Flat Ware
- Silver Jewelry
- Gold Jewelry • Broken Chains
- Old Rings • Bracelets
- Dental Gold

2901 Broadway, Suite E  
Next to Sears  
Yankton, SD 57078  
**605-260-4653**  
Wed., Thurs., Fri. 10AM-5PM  
Sat. 10AM-4PM  
www.midwestgold-silver.com

## Place a classified ad in the next Broadcaster Press.

Call **624-4429**