



USING VIRTUAL REALITY TO TREAT PTSD

After a decade of war, the Army reports that 76,176 soldiers have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)¹. Since 2004, The Geneva Foundation has partnered with military, industry, and academic collaborators in pursuit of effective and innovative treatments for PTSD.

For more than three years, Geneva employees have supported the Principal Investigator at the National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2) located at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State in evaluating the effectiveness of virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) in the treatment of combat-related PTSD.

The VRET research study evaluates the effectiveness of a “Virtual Iraq” program (developed by Dr. Albert “Skip” Rizzo, University of Southern California) by comparing it to prolonged exposure therapy and a waitlist group of active duty Soldiers. Through VRET, behavioral health providers use 360-degree, interactive computer-generated environments uniquely tailored to help the patient revisit their memory and emotionally process the memory, in order to reduce anxiety and

post-traumatic stress. The study leverages technology to overcome the stigma and negative perception of behavioral health treatment.

Soldiers in the study receive care by a Psychologist but instead of lying on a couch, they wear virtual reality goggles. Soldiers see, smell, hear, and feel many of the senses of their deployment experience. There may be a significant difference between someone closing their eyes and imagining the situation versus someone telling their story while the same type of event is activating the memory with relevant sights and sounds. Using innovation and technology in a way that “speaks” to Generation-Y service members, Geneva is helping the military develop a new way to treat PTSD.

To date, 127 soldiers have voluntarily been randomized to participate in the VRET research.

¹Associated Press 3/23/2012 as published in USA Today (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/story/health/story/2012-03-23/Army-Soldiers-diagnosed-with-PTSD-return-to-war/53728396/1>)

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