

THE BRIDGE

BRIDGING RESEARCH AND VETERANS HEALTH CARE

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Musician John Mayer Commits To A New Generation of Veterans

In the course of his decade-long career, musician John Mayer has sold over ten million albums, won seven Grammy awards, and received immense critical and popular success. In recent years, he has also dedicated himself to the cause of helping Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan readjust to life after deployment. In 2009, he began a partnership with NCIRE, bringing live music to Veterans around the country and directing a portion of his concert ticket sales to support Veterans health research.

His interest in the experience of military service members has focused on understanding the psychological challenges associated with return and readjustment from combat service. “Thousands of Americans have returned to the US, many of them with a large proportion of their living years ahead of them, and many thousands more will continue to return from combat in the coming months,” says Mayer. “We know who they are, where they are, and what they will need.”

In addition to welcoming service members backstage to chat, sending care packages overseas and drawing fans’ attention to stigmatized Veterans health issues, Mayer has become deeply engaged in



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— John Mayer

both the scientific advances and the barriers to care for Veterans carrying the wounds of war. “Seeing to it that we care for our returning Veterans is quite possibly our biggest collective duty as a nation,” says Mayer. “We know what challenges lay ahead, and we know very well the nature of them.”

His newest contribution to the collaboration is his support for the Veterans Health and Integration Program (VHIP), a civilian/military partnership designed to provide support to military personnel transitioning from combat duty to civilian life. Behavioral health clinicians and researchers at NCIRE will develop new fitness and integrative

medicine interventions, support contemporary health and nutrition resources, and create novel military acculturation services. “I have met some of the brightest minds in the country at NCIRE and they’re extremely well prepared to offer every resource known and as-yet-unknown to science and research,” Mayer says of the partnership.

As he has become increasingly fluent in the technical details of mental health research, Mayer has helped NCIRE establish a national platform for collaboration and communication in the field of Veterans health. “John is a terrific person to work with,” says Robert Obana, NCIRE Executive Director. “He has demonstrated a consistent and

(continued on page two)

NCIRE – The Veterans Health Research Institute

NCIRE is the leading self-funded nonprofit research institute in the United States devoted to advancing Veterans health research. We are affiliated with the San Francisco VA Medical Center and the University of California, San Francisco. Combined Federal Campaign No. 85275

Women play an increasingly large role in the United States military, making up approximately 12 percent of US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Women comprise 20 percent of new recruits, 15 percent of active duty personnel, 17 percent of National Guard and Reserve personnel, and about 8 percent of America's Veterans. More and more military roles are now open to women; they can serve as combat pilots in all service branches, and on all naval vessels including submarines.

As a result, "Women are also exposed to more trauma than in prior wars because of the ways in which they are directly involved," says SFVAMC psychologist and researcher Shira Maguen, PhD. She notes that while women are officially restricted to combat support roles, "they have weapons, they get shot at, they are in Humvees and tanks, they have exposure to dead bodies, to witnessing killing, to taking another life in war, just like all the other troops."

In 2009, when Dr. Maguen and her colleagues looked at the records of 329,000 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans seeking VA health care for the first time, they found that women Veterans were more likely to be diagnosed with depression, while men were more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD and alcohol use disorder. Women also had more anxiety and eating disorders than men.

In a 2011 study, Dr. Maguen found that among Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans with PTSD, 31 percent of women screened positive for military sexual trauma (MST), compared with only 1 percent of

"Women are also exposed to more trauma than in prior wars..."

- Shira Maguen, PhD

men. Veterans with PTSD and MST had more mental health diagnoses than those without MST, and women Veterans with PTSD and MST were more likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and eating disorders.

Dr. Maguen also points to several areas of relevance to women warriors that need more research. One is reproductive health. "A lot of these women are of childbearing age," she says. "Do they feel comfortable getting that care at the VA? What modifications might need to be made?"

Another area is the impact on families of women with PTSD. "When your mother comes home with PTSD, and she doesn't seem to be the same person, and she can't care for you the same way as before, that really has a ripple effect on families," says Dr. Maguen.

The long-term effects of combat on women is another understudied area, according to Dr. Maguen. "We know more about the long-term effects of PTSD in men than in women coming home from war," she says. Traumatic brain injury is of particular interest to Dr. Maguen. "Are there gender differences in the long-term health effects of blast exposures?" she asks. "There are no studies that I am aware of that have looked at that question in newly-returned women."

The bottom line, she says, is that "there is no shortage

of areas of investigation with regard to women warriors. The amount we know pales in comparison to what we have yet to learn."



Thomas Neylan, MD and Shira Maguen, PhD

Musician John Mayer Commits To A New Generation of Veterans *(continued from page one)*



Members of the US Army 63rd Regional Support Command enjoying a Mayer concert in San Jose

humble interest in the men and women who defend our country, and he also has a remarkably clear understanding of the scientific advances and challenges. He knows how the science fits into the bigger mission of caring for Veterans. We could not have asked for a more thoughtful and inquisitive partner."

Mayer sees his interest and contribution as a duty to those who have served in the US Armed Forces. "Our part as Americans who have not seen war is to go deeper than the 24-hour news cycle or the fashion of culture when it comes to Veteran's health. We must put forth a consistent, long term effort to see to it that the word "Veteran" is associated with only the very best that life has to offer. NCIRE has committed to setting a global precedent in returning Veterans' care, and I am committed to NCIRE."

JM Wristbands: Music Fans Supporting Veterans Health



Kristy Marcus, Sue Ammons, and Brenda Butts (L to R) at The Brain at War 2011

Over the course of 2008 and 2009, Sue Ammons, Brenda Butts, and Kristy Marcus – devoted John Mayer fans and best friends – founded and organized JM Wristbands. Wristbands, they explained in a recent group interview via email, are a customary way for dedicated music fans to identify each other at concerts; sales proceeds are donated to charity. "When John's management contacted us with the idea of selling wristbands for John's entire Summer 2010 tour, we

ran with it," they recalled. Confronted with the challenge of selling wristbands at each show, they organized a corps of 40 volunteers who sold wristbands at most of the 37 venues on the tour. "All of our volunteers were great!" they said. "Thanks to their efforts, plus support from John's management and fans from all over the world, we have sold about 3,500 wristbands so far." They have also collected hundreds of letters from fans, which they have forwarded to NCIRE to be sent to troops overseas.

In June, 2011, in an effort to better understand Veterans health issues, the trio traveled to San Francisco to attend the fourth annual meeting of *The Brain at War* conference. "We're now much better equipped to explain to the JM community how their donations have been used," they said, "and why it is important that we do our small part to help out." They noted that the stigma surrounding post-traumatic stress and other psychological health issues "became a tangible thing for us. We have all heard stories about PTSD, but to hear it first hand from someone who is still recovering has given us a perspective we never would have otherwise gained."

The Wristbanders have also learned something about their fellow fans: "John Mayer has the most generous fans out there! We feel that John's music has made such an impact on us that the least we can do to show our appreciation is to be involved with something important to him. We have learned that if it's important to John, his fans are willing to stand behind it, no questions asked."

Visit JM Wristbands at www.jmwristbands.com

From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

There is no escaping the urgent need to address the unique health issues faced by those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these issues result directly from the conditions they have experienced: multiple deployments; increased risk of traumatic brain injury; no safe place "behind the lines" to find respite from battle; and sudden transition from warfare back to civilian society — a phenomenon experienced by Guard and Reserve troops in particular.

Fortunately, a new generation of patriots is responding to the needs of a new generation of Veterans. We highlight some of their efforts in this issue of *The Bridge*. You will learn how the multitalented musical artist John Mayer — joined by some of his fans — is working with NCIRE to create and sponsor new clinical and research programs to help Veterans with their return and readjustment experiences. Here at Fort Miley, our own Dr. Shira

Maguen conducts research on issues relevant to women warriors, who play a much larger role in today's warfare than ever before.

Whether caring for an aging Veteran of the Korean War or helping a young Marine readjust to life back in the States, the Friends of Veterans Health Research can be confident that their efforts are appreciated by those who have fought on their behalf. Thank you for all you have done and will continue to do.

Warm regards,

Robert E. Obana

Robert E. Obana
NCIRE – The Veterans Health Research Institute



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DATES

June 20 &
June 21, 2012

The Brain at War and *Friends of Veterans Health Research* Come Together in June 2012

The fifth annual meeting of *The Brain at War* will take place on Thursday, June 21, 2012 at the Marines' Memorial Club and Hotel in San Francisco, California.

The Brain at War is the leading national conference on the neurological and psychological consequences of combat. Conference attendees join NCIRE – The Veterans Health Research Institute at the center of one of the most critical research efforts of our time: improving the health of our men and women who have served in uniform.

In conjunction with *The Brain at War*, the Friends of Veterans Health Research will hold its third annual celebration on the evening of Wednesday, June 20, also at Marines' Memorial. We hope to see you there.

Support Veterans Health Research

You can make a gift online at www.ncire.org/donate

To make a gift of cash or securities, please contact Robin Morjikian at 415/750-6643 or robin.morjikian@ncire.org
Checks should be payable to NCIRE. The tax I.D. number is 94-3084159.
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