

Tulane University's Center for Brain Health ready to serve veterans in need of health care

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roger@tulane.edu



Dr. Gregory Stewart will oversee a new veteran-focused program created to address the unique medical needs of members of the armed forces. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

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Chad Hennings is a College Football Hall of Famer and three-time Super Bowl Champion. Hennings is also a military veteran of the United States Air Force, who

flew 45 combat missions in an A-10 Thunderbolt II (Warthog) during Operation Provide Comfort, which defended Kurdish civilians fleeing their homes in northern Iraq in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

In both cases, Hennings was on the front lines in two of the world's most physically and mentally demanding professions, from which few walk away without repercussions.

The new [Tulane University Center for Brain Health](#) (TUCBH) is a veteran-focused program created to address the unique medical needs of members of the armed forces. Housed inside the Tulane Medical Center, the center will specialize in caring for military veterans of any discharge status and specialize in the treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Dr. Gregory Stewart, the W. Kennon McWilliams Professor of Sports Medicine in Orthopaedics and co-founder and co-director for the [Tulane Center for Sport](#), will oversee a staff of over 30 doctors, specialists and experts.

For veterans such as Hennings, having a program like the TUCBH that provides medical care for veterans after they have served their country is a crucial resource for life after the military.

"It is very important for veterans to have the kind of medical access that Dr. Stewart and his group will be offering, particularly for veterans that have fallen through the cracks or that don't fit necessarily within the VA (Veteran's Health Administration) system, based upon how they've separated from their branch of military service," Hennings said. "These are individuals who have served and many times, through extenuating circumstances, are separated due to potential injury. Dr. Stewart and his staff can address those needs and bring that individual back to be a contributing member of society and our community. This is a program that needs to be taken advantage of by veterans."

"It is truly an honor to take care of these veterans, who have put their bodies, minds and lives on the line to protect our country," Stewart said. "We are taking a unique approach to treating them for their various physical and mental injuries. I'm excited to learn what we need to in order to better care for these men and women, and at the same time, to help inform others of how to appropriately care for our veterans. This is another tremendous opportunity for Tulane to show that, as an institution, we are working at a very high level on the national stage. This isn't something that just

anybody can do. There is a limited group of individuals who truly understand this type of treatment and the treatment process. I think for us to have this opportunity to help care for these individuals, is a privilege.”

According to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, 413,858 service members were diagnosed with Traumatic Brain Injury from 2000-2019. The mission of the TUCBH is to aid in the healing, recovery and preventive treatment of veterans by treating the whole veteran and providing the most comprehensive and multidisciplinary care.

Jeremy Brewer is a Tulane alumnus and Marine Corps veteran, who completed two combat tours in Iraq. He has served the veteran community for over 10 years as part of various organizations, including Wounded Warrior Project and Bastion Community of Resilience. As the clinical navigator at TUCBH, Brewer can offer advice and support for his fellow veterans seeking treatment.

“There are only a few places around the country that offer this level of care to veterans. We offer a three-day interdisciplinary evaluation to eligible veterans. In a typical healthcare system, it may be possible for a veteran to get all these evaluations and assessments from all these different disciplines. However, it would take months at a minimum, and the veteran wouldn't receive a personalized treatment plan based on input from all the disciplines. The unique aspect of our program is that, due to the generosity of our funders, these services will not cost the veteran anything beyond their time and a commitment to healing,” said Brewer.

The process includes an interdisciplinary diagnostic evaluation, an intensive outpatient program, discharge planning and patient follow-up for at least one year.

During a three-day diagnostic evaluation, veterans will meet the care team and participate in one-on-one evaluations with specialists. Patients are provided with an individualized treatment plan administered by the veteran's care team or through Tulane's Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) at the conclusion of the evaluation.

Kriss Bradley Morrison is a Tulane alumna and the director of clinical operations for TUCBH. Morrison has led the change and growth in healthcare organizations for over 20 years and has dedicated her career to working in physical medicine and rehabilitation with people experiencing catastrophic disabilities.

“The TUCBH customizes care to each patient’s needs, offering a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to the treatment and evaluation of veterans struggling with persistent symptoms from mild to moderate traumatic brain injury (including concussion), changes in emotions, physical functioning and thinking. Our philosophy is to provide care for the body, mind and spirit using conventional medicine with complementary and alternative medicine. This is truly a patient-focused program,” Morrison said.

Veterans returning to Tulane for treatment will spend three weeks in various IOP programs, including behavioral health, speech and language, physical therapy, neurology, pharmacology, case management, canine, yoga and other alternative therapies.

“The Tulane School of Medicine has a long-standing tradition of providing care to our veterans, with many of our faculty also on staff at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Hospital. We are proud to build upon our long-standing traditions of research and clinical care by aiding our veterans through the work of the TUCBH, where our physicians will be able to apply a holistic treatment regimen and give back to those who have provided so much through their service to our country,” said Dr. Lee Hamm, dean of the School of Medicine and senior vice president.

[Operation Bootstrap](#) is the inaugural sponsor support program for TUCBH. The program will feature unique opportunities for individuals and organizations to support the mission and care of the veterans. TUCBH will rely on outside support and donations, which enables the group to focus resources on veterans' clinical treatment and medical needs. All services are provided free of charge to the veteran.

Additional opportunities for individuals to support veterans come in the form of canine-assisted therapy through the “Canine Companion Fund.” Evidence suggests that ongoing animal-assisted therapy can benefit veterans in need by improving their emotional, mental and physical well-being. Through this fund, TUCBH can support the training, day-to-day care and health of the canine companions.

TUCBH has partnered with the Jung Hotel and Residences for the “Sleep Well, Eat Well, Be Well” initiative. Veterans are encouraged to stay during their evaluation or treatment and will be provided with lodging, meals, laundry and other comforts for the duration of their treatment.

"The Jung Hotel & Residences, part of J Collection Hotels, is honored and committed to serving as the host hotel for Tulane University Center for Brain Health. We are proud to be a part of such an important program that centers on veteran care and compassion. The Jung's well-appointed and modern accommodations, along with its proximity to Tulane Medical Center, make it the ideal home away from home for these heroes. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Tulane and supporting the community of the Bio-Medical District of New Orleans," said Joseph A. Jaeger, Jr., principal.

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- Chad Hennings, three-time Super Bowl Champion and military veteran of the United States Air Force