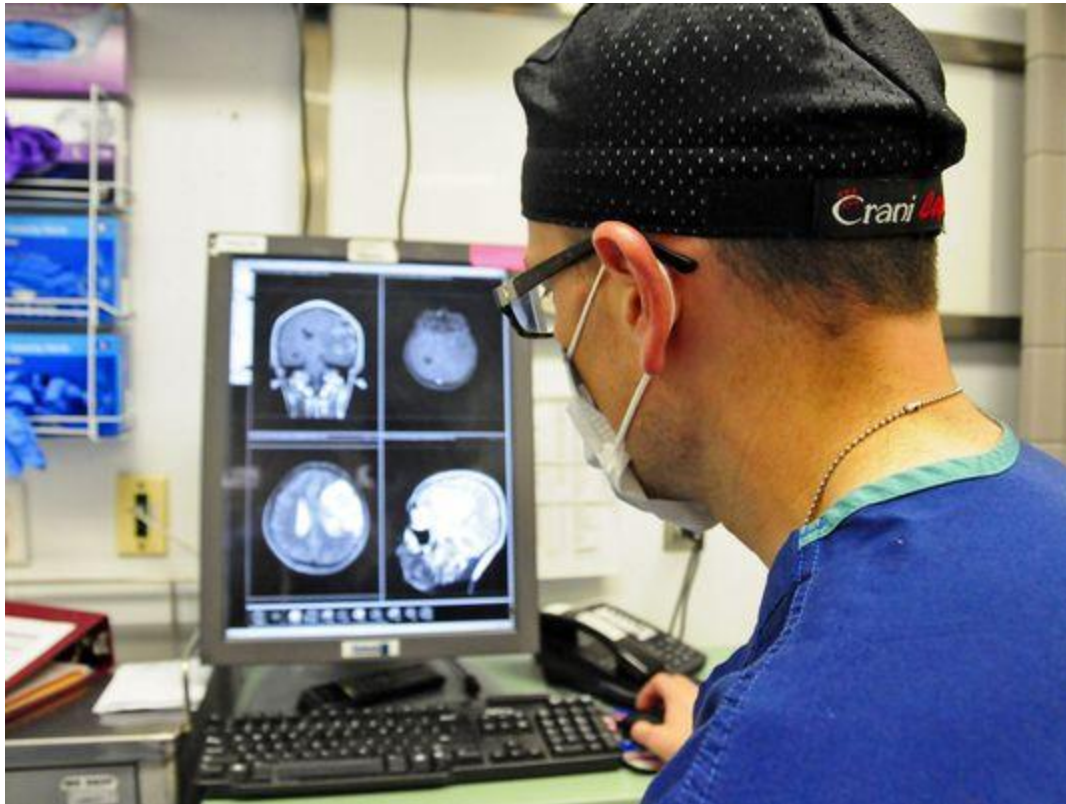


Tests treatments for brain injury and PTSD to be focus of new nonprofit

By Patricia Kime, Staff writer 9:55 a.m. EST November 12, 2015 AIR FORCE TIMES



(Photo: Staff Sgt. Miguel Lara/Air Force)

A new nonprofit organization is seeking to cut the time it takes for brain injury and post-traumatic stress research to transform into treatments for those life-altering conditions.

Cohen Veterans Bioscience, with offices in New York and Cambridge, Massachusetts, hopes to facilitate development and production of diagnostic tests for traumatic brain injury and PTS as well as treatments and cures.

About 1.7 million Americans experience head injuries each year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Such injuries are not uncommon in the military; 327,299 troops were diagnosed with a TBI from 2000 to March 2015.

Additionally, more than 138,000 active-duty members who deployed in support of combat operations were diagnosed with PTSD from 2001 to 2015, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Cohen Veterans Bioscience wants to "improve the scientific understanding of the basic biological mechanisms" of head injury and PTS, said president and CEO Dr. Magali Haas.

"Despite significant investment by the National Institutes of Health and the Defense Department in basic science, there is still a huge unmet need for these individuals," Haas said. "There are only two approved medications for PTS and nothing for TBI. The fact that this gap exists despite these investments indicates that more work needs to be done."

In 2013, the White House announced an ambitious plan to map the brain, with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency receiving \$100 million to aid the effort and determine how individual brain cells and neural circuits work and function together.

Haas said this research, as well as other projects by academia, government agencies and private corporations, have led to surprising breakthroughs and understanding.

But she added that much more must be done, and her organization will focus primarily on "translational research" — efforts designed to shorten the gap between scientific discovery and treatment.

"It's basically accelerating time," she said of her group's mission.

Cohen Veterans Bioscience was made possible by Steven Cohen, chairman and CEO of Point72 Asset Management. He is a philanthropist who has financed other veterans mental health programs, including the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Veterans Center for the Study of Post-Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury at NYU Langone Medical Center and the Cohen Military Family Clinic at NYU Langone.

"Our veterans have come back from Iraq and Afghanistan facing PTS and TBI, and we owe it to them to find better diagnostic tools and treatments," Cohen said. "PTS is often misdiagnosed or undiagnosed, and our service members don't receive effective treatment as a result."

Haas said Cohen Veterans Bioscience has immediate plans to fund \$30 million in research programs over the next five years and has established partnerships with NYU and Columbia University.

In addition to focusing on translational research, the organization also plans to use big data to develop models for who might be susceptible to PTS, concussion or more severe brain injury.

Haas says she hopes to shorten the development for diagnostics and treatments from the average 11 to 13 years to five years, and, for a diagnostic test, perhaps as little as three years.

"It is sometimes disheartening to hear it's going to be another three, five, 10 years until we have that first-generation diagnostic test, but I think it's actually going to be sooner than that because the investments are right," Haas said.

"There are so many new things we are learning about brain health — about exercise, nutrition, cognitive games — that are helpful for these conditions, and I think people should be thinking very positively about the potential in the near future for treatment."