



**HOUSTON
COMMUNITY
NEWSPAPERS**

conroe courier - news

Study looks at virtual reality exposure therapy for PTSD

[Print Page](#)

Published: 09.18.10

The Department of Defense National Center for Telehealth and Technology, in partnership with the Defenses Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and the Department of Psychology at Madigan, were funded by the United States Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, to conduct a four-year study to determine the effectiveness of virtual reality exposure therapy on active-duty servicemembers returning from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom who are suffering from PTSD.

Through the therapy, behavioral health providers can use 360-degree, interactive computer-generated environments uniquely tailored to expose the patients back into the environment and experience where the trauma occurred, to help reduce anxiety and post-traumatic stress.

The congressionally-funded medical research study is the first randomized clinical trial that uses active-duty military diagnosed with combat-related PTSD to compare virtual reality exposure therapy results to traditional "imaginal" prolonged exposure therapy, and to a control group that waits five weeks for any type of treatment.

The study's sample size is 120 servicemembers to complete the three types of treatment options. Treatment sessions for each type of therapy last about 90 minutes.

Patients undergoing the therapy still explain to the therapist what happened that caused the trauma, but are exposed to a variety of computer-generated stimuli with the program, "Virtual Iraq." The therapy is designed to promote a multi-sensory emotional connection to the memory, helping the patient be able to gradually face the traumatic experiences that underlie his or her distressing memories after a number of treatment sessions.

This connection is facilitated by having the patient put on video glasses and either ride or drive in a simulated convoy and watch a matched scenario to the event. Or, a soldier will be given a dummy M-4 with a mounted game controller and conduct a dismounted patrol with simulate gunfire.

The program can be customized to simulate the experience, ensuring ample control of the exposure to the programmed situations, such as changing weather conditions, terrain, helicopter flyovers, types of attack and even adding in Muslim prayer call. The basic reasoning behind this simulation is to desensitize the soldier to the event which occurred, and therefore lessening the affects of PTSD.

Even though the treatment is still being developed the DoD is expanding its use of the treatments. Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. and the Naval Medical Center San Diego are conducting their own studies. Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii and a number of Veterans Affairs hospitals are starting to use virtual reality as more servicemembers transition into veterans.

If you have any questions about this or any other VA benefits, contact Montgomery County Veterans Service, located at 2247 N. First St., Suite 219, Conroe; phone (936) 539-7842 or e-mail vetsvc@co.montgomery.tx.us.

Copyright © 2010 - Houston Community Newspapers Online

[\[x\] Close Window](#)