TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY:
Lessons Learned from Our Nation’s Athletes and Military

a symposium hosted by the University of Missouri School of Law Veterans Clinic

ABOUT THE VETERANS CLINIC
Students in the University of Missouri School of Law Veterans Clinic help veterans and their families secure disability-related benefits. Student work is done primarily at the Board of Veterans’ Appeals level and before the Court of Appeals for Veterans’ Claims.

REGISTRATION AND GENERAL INFORMATION
All events will be held in Room 7, Hulston Hall, on the University of Missouri campus.

For more information, please visit law.missouri.edu/veteransclinic-symposium or contact mulawvetclinic@missouri.edu.

Please visit our website to register. Registration is requested but not required. Early registration is appreciated.

PARKING
Free parking is available near the Hearnes Center on the University of Missouri campus. Shuttle service from the Hearnes Center to Hulston Hall will be provided by the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute. For more information about parking and shuttle service, please visit law.missouri.edu/veteransclinic-symposium.

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On May 19, 2005, the New England Journal of Medicine published Dr. Susan Okie’s article, “Traumatic Brain Injury in the War Zone,” which reported on the case of Sgt. David Emme, who was severely brain-injured by an improvised explosive device (IED) while part of a convoy transporting Iraqi volunteers for military training. Knocked unconscious, temporarily blinded and unable to hear in his left ear, Sgt. Emme regained consciousness 10 days later in the neuroscience unit of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. He was unable to speak. After five months of extensive therapy, Sgt. Emme regained most of his vision, but was still struggling with verbal communication, reasoning, memory and problem-solving.

Sgt. Emme was one of 450 service members treated at Walter Reed from 2003 to 2005 for traumatic brain injury (TBI). Many of these cases – 56 percent – were considered “severe.” The numbers reflect the reality of today’s modern wars. Unlike the casualties of war suffered long ago, when soldiers with brain trauma died from their injuries, the use of Kevlar body armor and helmets in today’s conflicts increases survival rates. But state-of-the-art helmets cannot completely protect the head or prevent closed brain injury caused by blasts. More than 30,000 service members suffer from TBI, with an estimated economic cost of $76.5 billion.

Kansas City Chiefs player Javon Belcher shot and killed his girlfriend before killing himself on December 1, 2012. CNN reported that pathology reports found Belcher suffered from brain disease known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). CTE was found in the brains of 87 of 91 deceased NFL players who donated their bodies for research, according to a study released on September 18, 2015. This number is consistent with earlier research results in 2014, finding 76 of 79 brains of deceased NFL players revealed evidence of CTE. As explained by Dr. Ann McKee, one of the doctors involved in the studies, this is not a matter of sensationalizing an issue to create controversy for football fans or the NFL, “this is a very real disease.”

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CTE is caused by head trauma. It is progressive and degenerative, marked by depression, anger, disorientation, memory loss and suicidal ideation. CTE is definitively diagnosed only after death. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “TBI may happen from a blow or jolt to the head or an object penetrating the brain. When the brain is injured, the person can experience a change in consciousness that can range from becoming disoriented and confused to slipping into a coma.” Evidence of CTE has been found in the brains of veterans, just as it has been found in NFL players.

To be sure, there is an overlap between injuries observed in our nation’s athletes and in our nation’s service members returning from recent conflicts. The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), in conjunction with Boston University, is carefully studying brain injury. In fact, DVA maintains the brain repository in Bedford, Mass., from which many of the studies discussed above emanate.

The Veterans Clinic at the University of Missouri School of Law is pleased to present its second annual symposium focusing on the legal and practical issues arising from traumatic brain injury, a very real concern for athletes and our military.