Navy Surgeon General Discusses the Importance of "Bench to Bedside" Medical Research
By: Cmdr. Cappy Surette

LANSDOWNE, VA -- Navy Surgeon General, Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson, Jr. discussed the importance of military medical research Apr. 6 at the inaugural Navy Medicine Research Symposium held at the National Conference Center here. Hosted by the Navy Medical Research and Development Center, the conference focused on addressing critical advances in unique medical needs of the warfighter, especially wounded Sailors and Marines over the full continuum of care.

Speaking to an audience of comprised of the military medical research community, Robinson emphasized the need to focus on advancements that have the most immediate and direct impact on the warfighter, to include mental health care for those wounded warriors who may be suffering from operational combat stress, post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

"We have numerous programs are in place, both in Iraq and Afghanistan and at Navy hospitals throughout the United States, to help warriors transition from the combat zone to the home front, but we can do more in the research and development arena to help these warriors," said Robinson. "We must always strive to do better."

In recent years, Navy medical research has made many significant improvements in battlefield medical care. Some recent examples of innovations include improvements to wound management, heterotopic ossification which is the process by which bone tissue forms outside of the skeleton, and diagnostic imaging of the flow of blood through specific areas of the body that have been wounded. These initiatives and others directly support Navy Medicine's top priorities.

"The close proximity of clinical medicine and basic research is yielding tremendous opportunity from 'bench to bedside' medical research," said Robinson.

The issue of military medical research has grown in importance in recent years. In a June 2008 Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense, sent a memo to the Service Secretaries about caring for our wounded personnel and their families stating that medical related research was one of his top priorities.

"The Department funds billions of dollars of medical research annually for a variety of purposes," Gates said in the memo. "It is not apparent that our medical research program has been adjusted to refocus priority resources on advancing the state of medical science in those areas of most pressing need and relevance to today's battlefield experience, particularly in the area of mental health and traumatic brain injury."

In the memo, Gates also requested the development of a tailored plan to provide Research and Development investments that advance state of the art solutions for world class medical care with an emphasis on PTSD, TBI, prosthetics, Restoration Sight Eye-Care, and other conditions directly relevant to the injuries our soldiers are currently receiving on the battlefield.

Attendees at the symposium discussed how they are working to support leadership's call to tailor Navy medical research to support today's military personnel who are working in difficult operating environments.

"Through a translational research effort involving clinicians, scientists and residents, we have determined that it is not just the physical destructive nature of the wounds that we see, but the body's response to that injury that requires multiple resources to treat," said Cmdr Eric Elster, Director of Traditional Research at the Navy Medical Research Command. "By measuring and fine-tuning this response, we are attempting to transform combat casualty care."

The Navy's Surgeon General also shared his views on how the Navy Medical Research community directly supports the Maritime Strategy.

"Navy Medicine Research and Development plays an important role in the U.S. military in creating and sustaining the partnerships around the world which are essential in making our world safer and better for all," said Robinson

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