

For Immediate Use

Jan. 18, 2012

[\(Read this release online\)](#)

## **UCLA joins forces with White House to meet unique needs of veterans, families**

### **First lady praises academic institutions for dedication to America's warriors**

Roxanne Moster, [rmoster@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:rmoster@mednet.ucla.edu)

Amy Albin, [aalbin@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:aalbin@mednet.ucla.edu)

310-794-0777

As part of a White House effort to ensure that America's military heroes receive care worthy of their service, the UCLA Health System and the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA have pledged to mobilize their uniquely integrated missions in education, research and clinical care to help train physicians to meet the special needs of veterans, active service members and their families.

[Joining Forces](#), an initiative launched by first lady Michelle Obama and Jill Biden, [announced last week](#) that UCLA and a number of other renowned institutions, along with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), have partnered to help create a new generation of doctors, medical schools and research facilities that can deliver first-rate care to current and former military members, including treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries.

The commitment is the latest in a series of ongoing efforts by the UCLA Health System and the Geffen School of Medicine to provide cutting-edge medical and mental health care to wounded warriors and their loved ones.

"We are honored to participate in the White House Joining Forces initiative to address the health care needs of military service members, veterans and their families," said Dr. A. Eugene Washington, UCLA's vice chancellor for health sciences and dean of the Geffen School of Medicine. "We launched [Operation Mend](#) in 2007, a program that provides reconstructive surgery and medical services to service members wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. This unique medical program combines the best of the military's resources with

the skills of the UCLA Health System for a comprehensive and collaborative treatment approach for those who have served our country.

"We're also pleased to address the mental health needs of U.S. military personnel and their families through our [FOCUS \(Families OverComing Under Stress\)](#) program. Currently being implemented at over 20 sites around the country and in Japan, UCLA's FOCUS provides mental health intervention, treatment and support to improve the psychological health of our military members and their families. Our goal is to show these heroes that their country is there for them, no matter what they're going through."

Together, the Geffen School of Medicine, the UCLA Health System, the AAMC and the AACOM are committed to enriching medical education to make physicians aware of the clinical challenges and best practices associated with caring for this group; developing new research and clinical trials on post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries to better understand and treat these conditions; sharing information and best practices with each other and other institutions through a collaborative web forum created by the AAMC; and growing the body of knowledge leading to improvements in health care and wellness for military service members, veterans and their families.

"I'm inspired to see our nation's medical schools step up to address this pressing need for our veterans and military families," Michelle Obama said. "By directing some of our brightest minds, our most cutting-edge research and our finest teaching institutions toward our military families, they're ensuring that those who have served our country receive the first-rate care that they have earned."

To date, UCLA's Operation Mend has treated nearly 60 U.S. soldiers wounded and disfigured in Iraq and Afghanistan. Founded by philanthropist Ronald A. Katz, a member of the board and executive committee of Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, and his late wife, Maddie, Operation Mend is a partnership among the UCLA Health System, Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, and the Veterans Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System.

The program's original goal was to give returning service members with severe facial injuries access to the Army's best burn center and the nation's best plastic and reconstructive surgeons. The mission has since expanded to include healing of the body, mind and spirit. In addition to plastic and reconstructive surgery, the program now provides mental health support for service members and their families, orthopedic reconstruction for severely damaged limbs, urologic treatment, otolaryngological care, examination and treatment of reproductive issues, repair of airways, and the design of prosthetic ears.

Since 2009, UCLA's Project FOCUS, led by associate professor of psychiatry Patricia Lester, has reached out to military families to help prevent the personal and psychological problems that long and often multiple wartime deployments can lead to, not only for the service member on the front lines but for families back home.

UCLA faculty have also been pivotal in [advancing research and policy](#) on post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries, a major focus of the new Joint Forces partnership.

David Hovda, a professor of neurosurgery and director of the [UCLA Brain Injury Research Center](#), is a national expert on traumatic brain injuries who played a key role in advising the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the establishment of mandatory protocols to help service members recover after suffering such injuries. In June 2011, the U.S. Army presented Hovda with its [Strength of the Nation Award](#) for his extraordinary contributions to caring for the nation's wounded warriors. The award is presented annually to an individual who engages in exemplary public service that makes a substantial contribution in completing the Army's mission. Operation Mend's Ronald Katz received the award in 2010.

"It is a privilege for the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center to assist our country's men and women in the military," said Dr. David T. Feinberg, president of the UCLA Health System and CEO of the UCLA Hospital System. "We are honored to partner with Brooke Army Medical Center to help heal several of America's wounded warriors — and to partner with the White House Joining Forces initiative."

[Joining Forces](#) was created by first lady Michelle Obama and Jill Biden to bring Americans together to recognize, honor and take action to support veterans and military families as they serve our country, and throughout their lives. The initiative aims to educate, challenge and spark action from all sectors of society to ensure that veterans and military families have the support they have earned. The initiative focuses on key priority areas — employment, education and wellness — while raising awareness about the service, sacrifice and needs of veterans and their families.

[The UCLA Health System](#), which comprises the UCLA Hospital System and the UCLA Medical Group and its affiliates, has provided the best in health care and the most advanced treatment options to the people of Los Angeles and the world for more than half a century. UCLA's preeminence in health care — a strength that comes from the union of research, teaching and excellence in patient care — continues to be recognized nationally, internationally and in numerous forums. Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, the Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital at UCLA, Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA, and UCLA Medical Center–Santa Monica (which includes the Los Angeles Orthopaedic Hospital) deliver hospital care that is unparalleled in California. Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center is consistently ranked one of the top five hospitals in the nation and the best in the western United States by U.S. News & World Report, and the UCLA Medical Group has been ranked among the best in Southern California for four successive years by the Integrated Healthcare Association. UCLA physicians and hospitals will continue to be world leaders in the full range of care, from maintaining the health of families to the diagnosis and treatment of complex illnesses.

For more news, visit the [UCLA Newsroom](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).