

# **We carry each other**

## **Back from Iraq: Traumatic Brain Injury Surfaces as the Not-So-Silent Epidemic Wound of the War**

By Mary Beth Sammons

David McRae and his mother Leona Nunley live at the Epicenter of Traumatic Brain Injury. Every day starts with a new challenge to survive and thrive.

At 39, David is just one of at least 1.4 million Americans that have sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Brain injuries typically are caused by falls, motor vehicle crashes, (David's was on a motorcycle), assaults, and sports/recreation accidents. With a brain injury occurring every 23 seconds, this public health concern ranks as the leading cause of death and disability in children and young adults.

Now, it turns out that 60 percent of soldiers recently wounded in Operation Iraqi Freedom have sustained blast injuries and doctors estimate that between 60% and 80% of these blast-injured soldiers have TBI, according to statistics compiled by The Brain Injury Association of America.

Unlike penetrating head injuries, closed head injuries - such as those that often result from blasts - may not be diagnosed immediately. Although recovery from mild brain injuries is generally uncomplicated and complete, some individuals continue to experience cognitive or mood difficulties. These injured soldiers require specialized care from providers skilled in treating TBI.

TBI can lead to problems ranging from balance and coordination issues to loss of hearing, vision or speech. Fatigue, memory loss, concentration difficulty, anxiety, depression, impulsivity; and impaired judgment are also common after brain injury.

Even so called "mild" injuries can have devastating consequences that require intensive treatment and long-term care. The annual estimated cost to society exceeds \$60 billion.

\* Information from The Brain Injury Association of America. The association was founded in 1980 by individuals who wanted to improve the quality of life for their family members and patients who had sustained brain injuries. Today, the Association is headquartered just outside Washington, DC, and encompasses a nationwide network of more than 40 state affiliates with a shared mission of creating a better future through brain injury prevention, research, education and advocacy. For more information about brain injury or the Brain Injury Association of America, please visit [www.biausa.org](http://www.biausa.org).