

Advocacy Efforts Pay BIG Dividends for Tinnitus Research

ATA rang in the New Year with some great news that will eventually and undoubtedly contribute to silencing the ringing in your ears. The Department of Defense (DoD) recently funded two tinnitus investigators for their meritorious grant proposals.

BY JENNIFER DUPRIEST, ATA DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The first grantee is Didier Depireux, Ph.D., an ATA-funded researcher at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. He will continue his investigations on targeting and reducing noise-induced tinnitus and hearing loss, particularly in military personnel exposed to blasts.

Dr. Depireux credits ATA with his ability to secure this funding because we provided him with essential seed money: "Thanks wholly to a grant from ATA, I was able to develop a rat model of tinnitus and to obtain sufficient data to obtain from the Peer Review Medical Research Program (PRMRP) a grant in the amount of \$672,000 over three years." Dr. Depireux will study whether steroids are an effective treatment for those with noise-induced tinnitus. He will determine the window of time, after noise trauma, when the treatment may be most effective.

The second recipient is Hinrich Staecker, M.D., Ph.D., a current ATA Scientific Advisory Committee member working in the Dept. of Otolaryngology at the University of Kansas Medical Center. Dr. Staecker will receive

"Tinnitus is a common problem in patients exposed to noise and firearms and currently can be managed but not cured," says Dr. Staecker. "Thanks to the efforts of ATA, awareness of this problem in military personnel has been recognized, resulting in the Department of Defense making tinnitus research a priority. Our medical center has an ongoing history of tinnitus research and is proud to expand this program with the support of the DoD."

ATA's advocacy work in Washington, D.C., has been instrumental in persuading the government to increase its tinnitus research allocation by almost \$2 million in just one year! And that's a real boost to our journey on the road to a cure.

How the funding came to pass

In the April 2008 issue of *Tinnitus Today*, we updated you on our efforts on Capitol Hill to influence tinnitus research through various government agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Because of those efforts, we were successful in getting tinnitus



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\$1,274,636 to try to determine if the regeneration of hair cells in the inner ear can not only restore hearing, but if it will mitigate tinnitus and restore normal brain function to the targeted tinnitus areas. This is the first study of its kind to study the efficacy of replacing inner ear hair cells!

listed as a researchable condition through the DoD's PRMRP program. Researchers were eligible to submit research proposals for funding through the Department of the Army to compete for \$50 million against 21 other

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conditions. The two awards to Drs. Depireux and Staecker, which total \$1,946,636, are a direct result of that success.

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) handles the external review of these grant applications and solicited both peer and consumer review applicants for this process. ATA provided AIBS with the credentials of 18 world-class tinnitus researchers interested in serving in the peer review process. Additionally, we nominated Scott C. Mitchell, J.D., C.P.A., Chair, ATA Board of Directors, and a tinnitus sufferer himself, as a consumer reviewer. AIBS selected Scott for the panel, a position he very much enjoyed. In recalling his experience, Scott noted that the process was well organized and efficiently run and that "it's what we've all dreamed about, the federal government funding tinnitus research. This outstanding effort by ATA's advocacy team is helping us fulfill our mission by including a greater number of concerned individuals in this effort." Scott's appointment to this panel is good

for two years. The program was so impressed with the caliber of his tinnitus knowledge, they have asked ATA to nominate another consumer who could potentially serve in the same capacity.

More good news

ATA's pavement pounding in Washington, D.C., resulted in a second consecutive year of tinnitus eligibility under the PRMRP. Congress rewrites the list of conditions every year. In the coming cycle, there are only 19 conditions to compete with instead of 21. It is essential that we continue pushing for this inclusion each cycle to ensure a viable tinnitus research effort. Although ATA did not directly fund this research, our encouragement and resourcefulness made sure the government included tinnitus in this program. The participation of our researchers, board members and staff in the review process has helped us indirectly influence the outcome and increase the tinnitus research funding available in the United States. Though our mission to cure tinnitus is not yet accomplished, we are well on our way. ☺☺

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ATA Participates in Award-Winning Broadcast

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A blast into an unfortunate future

For those military personnel experiencing roadside bombs, the sonic blast (faster than the speed of sound) that precedes the sound is what causes the most severe damage. Those pressure waves kill hair cells and can even damage the cochlea in the inner ear.

According to Dr. Hoffer, the Navy, Air Force and Army are conducting trials on a pill that has the potential to limit damage when taken within a few hours of exposure. According to Dr. Hoffer, the remedy will be readily available to combat troops within one to two years. However, countless troops are already affected and already suffering with the effects of blast exposure. So it is important to address prevention, early intervention and already established damage.

The second component, and the most important part of developing hearing protection, includes sufficient training and education so that our forces use it. They currently use a number of ear plugs, but must also consider situational awareness – when acute hearing is life-saving. For example, in urban combat, a soldier standing outside a house must be able to hear a rifle click on the other side of the door.

This NHCA media award, which includes Jennifer's knowledge and representation of ATA, is a wonderful acknowledgement of the work we are doing and our standing in the hearing health world.

To listen to the broadcast, go to our News/Publications section at www.ata.org/about-ata/news-publications. ☺☺