

American Homecomings: UCLA Medical Center, military hospitals form partnership to help veterans



Ronald Katz, the founder of Operation Mend, is in UCLA's Lockheed Martin TeleHealth Suite, where doctors from UCLA will work remotely with doctors from military hospitals in real time to help treat service men and women. (Photo by Hans Gutknecht/Los Angeles Daily News)

By [Susan Abram](#), Los Angeles Daily News

Posted: 11/17/13, 2:00 PM PST | Updated: 6 days ago

From a high-rise medical center in Los Angeles, UCLA physicians will be able to examine the war wounds of veterans in a military hospital in Texas or as far east as Maryland and even across the Atlantic Ocean and into Germany.

They will see brain injuries in real time, diagnose hearing problems, talk with family members who are caregivers and find the best treatment for the men and women who suffer from the invisible injuries of war, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, thanks to images soon to be beamed to them on two dozen telehealth monitors.

The new Lockheed Martin TeleHealth Suite opened at the University of California, Los Angeles, not only will allow doctors from different specialties to help veterans nationwide and even at

military bases globally, but also symbolizes a new kind of collaboration between civilian medical centers and military hospitals, where battlefield trauma will be treated on all fronts.

“With the wars we’ve been fighting, the problems we have are too big for military medicine to handle alone,” said Peter Chiarelli, a retired four-star general who served as the 32nd vice chief of staff of the Army, from August 2008 through January 2012. Chiarelli will serve as the executive adviser of the newly opened Ronald A. Katz Center for Collaborative Military Medicine at UCLA, considered a one-stop shop for ailing veterans and the first university-based military medicine center on the West Coast.

In the past, such collaborations rarely existed, but then, the wounds of war veterans have changed the health care landscape of servicemen and women for good, Chiarelli said. Of the 2.2 million veterans living in the United States who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan, nearly 50,000 servicemen and women have been physically injured, 400,000 have combat-related stress, major depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder and 320,000 have experienced a traumatic brain injury, according to figures provided by the Wounded Warrior Project.

“I see this as a real opportunity to get help from civilian medicine in helping us with some of these real difficult issues we’re trying to heal,” Chiarelli said. “I think it’s a new thing based on necessity. The problems are so great, that we have to reach out and find help wherever we can. This center will be kind of a vanguard.”

The suite makes up just one part of the center. The broader goal is to help physicians and researchers form partnerships with specialty-care experts and military hospitals to find the best possible treatment for servicemen and women, said Ronald Katz, who the center was named after. As a board member with the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, Katz founded Operation Mend, a program that works with Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas and the Veterans Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System to provide free reconstructive surgery to injured veterans.

In addition to housing Operation Mend, the center also will provide additional research and services for traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress and family support. The center was opened with a \$2 million gift from Katz’s sons, Todd and Randy, and their families, who also share in a belief that veterans need more health services, Katz said.

“There’s a need and we’re basically stepping out and trying to make connections for military medicine and specialty care,” Katz said.

But there’s more, he added.

“When veterans come in, we’ll also bring their families or caregivers, and we will apply our expertise to all of them,” he said. “The VA has a rule it can’t treat the children or the wife, but we can. We’re trying to fill in those holes. A family that is resilient helps the patient do much better. It’s quite wonderful to see a veteran who is resilient.”

The university also can make advances in trauma care, such as stem cell research, said Shannon O’Kelley, chief operating officer of UCLA’s Health System.

“Why not have a one-stop shop, and put us to work to find potential solutions?” O’Kelley said of the decision to meld military and civilian medicine.

Chiarelli said his goal as executive adviser is to find the gaps in care and utilize all that UCLA and military medicine have to offer.

“That’s my big goal,” he said. “To understand those gaps and reach out and find a way to fill them to help the servicemen and women. Los Angeles attracts a lot of veteran and there’s a real opportunity here, and with the help of other institutions, we can help treat those invisible wounds of war that have been so prevalent.”

This story has been updated to reflect the correct spelling of the Lockheed Martin TeleHealth Suite and correct title of Peter Chiarelli.