Kessler Foundation Researchers Awarded Grants for TBI Research

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Four Kessler Foundation researchers were awarded two-year grants to fund studies of functional and cognitive deficits in individuals who have experienced traumatic brain injury (TBI). The grants, totaling $713,000, were awarded by the New Jersey Commission on Brain Injury Research (NJCBIR).

Researchers will study functional and cognitive deficits in individuals with moderate to severe traumatic brain injury (TBI), including learning and memory, and limb mobility.

One grant, valued at $179,000, will fund a two-phase trial testing the “modified Story Memory Technique (mSMT)” in school-aged children. The mSMT trial will compare healthy controls with children who have cognitive deficits caused by TBI. The grant awardee, Dr. Nancy Chiaravalloti, previously conducted a study involving multiple sclerosis and mSMT which found that mSMT is effective for improving learning and memory in MS patients. Dr. Chiaravalloti is the director of neuropsychology, neuroscience and TBI research at Kessler Foundation, and director of the Northern New Jersey TBI Model System.

mSMT involves a multi-session memory retraining protocol based on visualization and context. In the first sessions, participants are presented with a story that includes imagery. In addition, certain words are capitalized. They are asked to remember as much of the story as they can. The therapist then provides tips on better ways to memorize the story. In later sessions, participants are presented with a list of words and asked to put the words in a story to enable them to memorize the list.

Thus, the first sessions teach participants to recognize imagery and use it in storytelling. The later sessions teach skills to put new information into a context. The final sessions provide information about how the memory skills can be used in everyday life.

If found to be effective in this study involving children and TBI, mSMT could potentially impact not only children’s lives but clinical practice and policy, according to Dr. Chiaravalloti.

The other three grants were awarded as follows:

Dr. Ekaterina Dobryakova will use her $177,000 grant to lead a study using neuroimaging to examine the neural mechanisms during feedback learning in individuals who have experienced TBI.

A $179,000 grant will enable Dr. Soha Saleh to explore the effects of a combination of physical and mental practice for the rehabilitation of upper extremity movement impairments secondary to TBI.

With her $178,000 grant, Dr. Peii Chen will study the efficacy of home-based arm and hand exercise to improve upper limb dysfunction after TBI.

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