

News Release: [Emory Healthcare](#) , [School of Medicine](#)

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Emory and Virtually Better, Inc. PTSD Experts Train Armed Services Mental Health Clinicians

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Department of Defense mental health clinicians will learn how to use Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET) to treat military personnel with PTSD in a training seminar Feb.1-2. Barbara Rothbaum, PhD and Maryrose Gerardi, PhD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Emory University School of Medicine, will participate as faculty members in the training program.

Josh Spitalnick, PhD, director of Research and Clinical Services at Virtually Better, Inc. (VBI), and adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Emory, secured a five-year contract with the U.S. Air Force and brought the training component to Emory. Virtually Better, Inc. is an Atlanta company that designs and develops virtual reality applications for behavior health interventions, research protocols and skills-based training initiatives.

Rothbaum, who serves as director of the Trauma and Anxiety Recovery Program at Emory, is a pioneer in the development of virtual reality therapy, and has been engaged in research related to VRET since 1993.

In addition, Rothbaum was involved in the development and testing of Virtual Vietnam exposure therapy program that was created in 1997 in partnership with Emory, the Georgia Institute of Technology and the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Atlanta. Virtual Vietnam laid the groundwork to create Virtual Iraq and other virtual reality PTSD applications.

JoAnn Difede, PhD, Cornell University Weill Medical College, was part of a team who developed the Virtual World Trade Center application, which has been used to treat survivors of the World Trade Center attacks of 9/11. Difede also will be on faculty at the Atlanta training.

Rothbaum and Gerardi are co-investigators in an ongoing National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) clinical trial being conducted at Emory testing virtual reality therapy for returning Iraq/Afghanistan military personnel diagnosed with PTSD.

The Virtual Iraq module was developed by Skip Rizzo, PhD, and colleagues at the Institute for Creative Technologies and School of Gerontology at the University of Southern California. Rizzo will serve on the faculty at the Atlanta training.

The Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs Health System have VRET hardware and software at over 30 sites around the country to treat returning service members diagnosed with PTSD, and further evaluate its efficacy.

The training will take place in the Student Activity and Academic Center, Emory University.

This current training is funded by the United States Air Force.

Emory University has a minority business partnership with Virtually Better, Inc. Rothbaum owns equity in Virtually Better, Inc. The terms of these arrangements have been reviewed and approved by Emory University in accordance with its conflict of interest policies. Gerardi has no financial interest in Virtually Better, Inc.

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