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TWO ATA SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS RECEIVE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE GRANT

- Anthony T. Cacace, Ph.D., Chair, and Jinsheng Zhang, Ph.D., Will Study Blast- and Concussion-Induced Tinnitus -

Portland, Oregon – The American Tinnitus Association (ATA) announced today that Drs. Anthony T. Cacace and Jinsheng Zhang, both of Wayne State University, have received a \$1.5 million grant from the United States Department of Defense (DoD) to study blast- and concussion-induced tinnitus. Tinnitus is the **number one** service-connected disability impacting veterans from all periods of service, and at the end of 2010, nearly 800,000 veterans from all periods of service were service-connected for it. Tinnitus is particularly prevalent in returning servicemen and women from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Leading researchers in their field, Dr. Cacace is the current Chair of ATA's Scientific Advisory Committee, a prestigious multi-disciplinary group of basic scientists and clinical researchers, and Dr. Zhang is also a contributing member.

Most commonly caused by exposure to very loud noise, tinnitus is often referred to as "ringing in the ears," and accompanied by some hearing loss. However, returning military personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan are reporting tinnitus in record numbers in the absence of any measurable hearing loss. Blast- and concussion-induced injuries to the ear and brain are the signature injuries of these conflicts, and are the second most frequent injury among military personnel and veterans.

Their project is designed to study tinnitus and related traumatic brain injury (TBI) to the ear and brain resulting from blast and concussion injuries. These issues will be addressed in parallel animal and human models.

"The goal of this work is focused on establishing the underlying mechanisms of blast- and concussion-induced tinnitus and related brain injury by applying contemporary methods used in neuroscience research, with intent to develop effective treatments towards the advancement of a cure," Zhang said.

The project will have two phases, and include animal and human study. The first phase will investigate blast- and concussion-induced tinnitus-related TBI in a rat model by evaluating anatomical, electrophysiological, and neurobiochemical changes in the brain following an air shock tube blast, a controlled blunt trauma, or both. The second phase will involve 90 individuals and will investigate blast- and concussion-induced tinnitus-related TBI in humans by performing neuropsychological and psychophysical tests, detecting pathophysiological changes and MRI imaging in patients with blast and concussive injuries.

"We anticipate the proposed research will have a significant impact on the new science and new frontiers in the field. All of these efforts will in return stimulate development for effective prevention and/or treatment of tinnitus and other neurological disorders," Zhang said. "Although this study will initially focus on military personnel exposed to explosions like roadside bombs or improvised explosive devices, the model should also have more general applications to civilians that have tinnitus due to excessive noise exposures and perhaps other related etiologies. We anticipate that once the underlying basis of blast- and concussion-induced tinnitus and related brain injury is established and clearly understood, effective treatment modalities will be developed in an expeditious manner."

ATA's advocacy program has worked tirelessly to increase both awareness of, and funding for, tinnitus research at the federal level. Specifically, a three-pronged approach targeting the U.S. National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Department of Defense. Mark K. Johnson, J.D., Chair of ATA's Board of Directors said, "This award represents a culmination of ATA's efforts combined with the quality and integrity of tinnitus research proposals submitted by Drs. Cacace and Zhang." Their contributions to the field through this grant, will be greatly anticipated by military and civilians alike.

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About the American Tinnitus Association

The American Tinnitus Association (ATA), headquartered in Portland, Ore., is the nation's foremost organization committed to curing tinnitus. For 40 years, ATA has helped tinnitus patients understand and manage the "ringing in their ears." ATA exists to cure tinnitus through the development of resources that advance tinnitus research. Founded in 1971, ATA has contributed millions of dollars to medical research projects focused on curing tinnitus. The association also provides information on tinnitus to the public and advocates for effective public policies that support its mission of curing tinnitus. www.ata.org.