A world-first study that will look at the genetic links between Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other serious illnesses such as chronic liver and heart disease is being undertaken at Greenslopes Private Hospital’s Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation (GMRF).

The Keith Payne Unit at Greenslopes Private Hospital developed one of the first and most respected treatment programs in Australia for veterans suffering from war-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and continues to lead the country with treatments and research in this area.

Key researchers, Associate Professor Bruce Lawford, Greenslopes Private Hospital Psychiatrist and Professor Ross Young of Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and GMRF, have already published on the genetic link to PTSD, severe depression and addictions over the years including very recently.

The aim was to develop more effective ways of assessing and treating service personnel with the disorder.

“We want to understand the types of genetic environmental risks that contribute to PTSD in defence personnel and the best way to treat those who become traumatised,” Professor Young said.

“Our current approaches tend to focus only on the psychological experiences, but we believe a more coordinated approach should examine the impact of chronic PTSD on physical health.

“For example, PTSD patients are more likely to suffer from serious lung, liver and heart diseases but we don’t know why.”

Professor Young said the project would also investigate whether the genetic factors that predispose veterans to PTSD also increased their likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse.

“This project will develop a truly holistic picture of PTSD veterans, leading to more personalised and effective treatment.”

The most recent defence study shows at least 8% or 2,491 of those deployed between 2002 and 2009 now have PTSD. GMRF will recruit 300 serving and ex-serving personnel to take part in the project involving research collaborators from QUT, the University of Queensland and Greenslopes Private Hospital.

As well as the psychiatrists at Greenslopes Private, other specialists are involved in the research study, including cardiologists, respiratory physicians, endocrinologists and gastroenterologists.

Given its military history, Greenslopes Private Hospital is especially proud to have this research conducted on site. The hospital, which opened as the 112th Australian general hospital in 1942, maintains an ongoing commitment to veterans and war widows, of which this research will play an important part.

The study into PTSD marks a significant achievement for the hospital which in 2012 celebrated its 70th anniversary. We look forward to this research providing real and relevant outcomes for our veterans, our defence force personnel and their families into the future. 

By Frances McChlery