



For Immediate Release

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Pulmonary Hypertension Association Salutes Veterans Raising Disease Awareness

Silver Spring, Md. (November 11, 2015) This Veterans Day, the Pulmonary Hypertension Association (PHA) salutes U.S. service men and women for their dedication on and off the battlefield. With Veterans Day coming during Pulmonary Hypertension Awareness Month, PHA is recognizing veterans who are champions in the fight against pulmonary hypertension (PH), a deadly, too-often misdiagnosed disease.

PH, which some people call “the other high blood pressure,” is increased pressure in the blood vessels of the lungs. PH puts pressure on the right side of the heart and can lead to death from heart failure. The average survival rate for PH patients who go without treatment is 2.8 years. Because symptoms of the progressive disease include breathlessness, fatigue, and chest pain, many patients receive a misdiagnosis, believing they have asthma or other less threatening illnesses before they learn they have PH.

Over PHA’s nearly 25-year-history (PHA marks its 25th anniversary in 2016), the association’s membership has included a number of patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals who have served in the armed forces. In recent years, and notably, in 2015, veterans have played key roles in advancing PH care and raising awareness about the disease. PHA invites the public to celebrate these veterans who are combatting PH and to [make a donation](#) in their honor.

Col. Carl Hicks

U.S. Army Ranger Carl Hicks confronted the biggest test of his courage when doctors diagnosed his 13-year-old daughter, Meaghan, with PH in 1994. For the next 14 years, Col. Hicks and his family were on the battlefield with Meaghan until she lost her fight against the disease in January 2009. In the spring of 2015, at age 61, in Meaghan’s honor, Hicks, now Executive Vice President at PHA, participated in a “Face Your PHears” fundraiser for the association’s Lone Star Chapter. Hicks rappelled “Over the Edge” more than 350 feet down the 29-story Four Seasons Hotel Houston. He did it wearing a zebra costume to illustrate that just as a zebra’s hoof beats might sound similar to a horse’s hoof beats, the symptoms of PH can be mistaken for a less threatening condition.

The “Pacing Parson”

In the summer of 2015, ahead of his 80th birthday, Don Stevenson (aka the Pacing Parson), a Seattle-area (Auburn, Wash.) retired minister and former U.S. Marine, completed a four-month, 3,000-mile cross-country walk, raising awareness and, so far, nearly \$10,000 in donations and pledges for PHA. In September, joined by PHA employees, support group patients, caregivers,

and others who followed his story, Stevenson walked the final yards of his 3,000-mile cross-country journey. While in Michigan, Stevenson visited with PH patients at the world-class University of Michigan (UM) PHA-accredited Pulmonary Hypertension Care Center. UM Medical School professor and center leader, Dr. Vallerie McLaughlin, a former chair of PHA's board of trustees, hosted the visit. As he walked through Ohio, Stevenson was celebrated at a "Buckeye Rally for Pulmonary Hypertension" at The Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center.

Staff Sergeant Clint Romesha

President Barack Obama bestowed the Medal of Honor on Romesha in February 2013 for courageously defending a remote American outpost in eastern Afghanistan from attack by more than 300 Taliban fighters. Romesha met up with Stevenson in Minot, N.D. to join the 79-year-old veteran's cross-country walk to raise awareness and money for PHA. Romesha walked through his hometown of Minot, N.D. with Stevenson, in July. Romesha said he was honored to walk with Don to raise money for PHA.

Jessica Armstrong and Latoynia Ransom-Harvey

On October 31, the Rock 'n' Roll Philadelphia Half Marathon served as a pivotal first meeting and game changer for two women — both U.S. Army veterans — in their fight against a rare form of PH. Thirty-four-year-old Jessica Armstrong and 41-year-old Latoynia Ransom-Harvey have chronic thromboembolic pulmonary hypertension (CTEPH), a form of PH caused by old, organized blood clots in the lungs. These veterans helped raise awareness about PH and particularly CTEPH, which occurs in up to 3.8 percent of patients who suffer from pulmonary embolisms (blood clots in their lungs). Through the half marathon's partnership this year with fundraising platform "everydayhero," the veterans ran to support PHA as part of its Team O2 breathe™ — individuals across the U.S. participating in endurance events to raise funds and awareness to fight PH.

Ransom-Harvey is a member of PHA's northern Virginia support group and Armstrong, heads PHA's Early Diagnosis Campaign. Armstrong received her diagnosis months after her deteriorating health cut short her deployment in Afghanistan. Ransom-Harvey's diagnosis came shortly after she returned to the U.S. from her deployment to Iraq and after years of believing her symptoms were due to asthma or allergies and wondering why no prescribed treatments worked.

Aware of the poor survival rate without treatment, Armstrong and Ransom-Harvey found renewed hope after completing a right heart catheterization and ventilation/perfusion (V/Q) scan, two essential diagnostic tests in the CTEPH workup. While understanding there is no cure for other forms of PH, the veterans learned that CTEPH patients may be candidates for a pulmonary thromboendarterectomy or PTE, a surgical procedure to remove the clots that can significantly reduce or even normalize blood pressure in the lungs. Both women underwent the PTE procedure, and remain on medication to keep new clots from forming as they continue to see specialists to monitor their lung pressures.

Staff Sergeant Michael Baugher

SSG Michael Baugher is the sole caregiver to his wife, Sophia, a PH patient. As a U.S. Army service member, Baugher is periodically deployed. In 2014, while serving in Afghanistan, Baugher and his unit requested and wore pulmonary hypertension awareness uniform patches to raise awareness of PH and to send "hope from Afghanistan" to his wife and the rest of the PH community. Baugher's efforts have inspired other service members who continue to raise awareness about the disease.

About the Pulmonary Hypertension Association

Headquartered in Silver Spring, Md., with a growing list of chapters across the country, the Pulmonary Hypertension Association (PHA) is the country's leading pulmonary hypertension organization. Its mission is to extend and improve the lives of those affected by PH; its vision is a world without PH, empowered by hope. PHA achieves this by connecting and working together with the entire PH community of patients, families and medical professionals. Among its programs, PHA facilitates more than 245 support groups around the country and delivers continuing education for medical professionals through *PHA Online University*. For 12 consecutive years, PHA has received the highest rating — four stars — for fiscal accountability and transparency from Charity Navigator, placing it in the top half of one percent of all rated charities. For more information, please go to www.PHAssociation.org, @PHAssociation on Twitter or www.facebook.com/PulmonaryHypertensionAssociation.