



## OUR HISTORY

**BACKGROUND:** Coastal Authority Care Foundation was founded by Jill and Brian Crist in December 2015. Brian retired from the Navy in 2010 after 24 years as a U.S. Navy SEAL. Given the extreme physical demands of his job and multiple deployments, he was exposed to years of repeated gunfire, explosions, falls and rigorous training which resulted in at least five surgeries by the time he retired. At that time, it was just prior to mTBI (mild traumatic brain injury) being recognized as a major issue and he was not screened for it. There was so much focus around

finding a new job and becoming a “civilian” after 24 years that he was not making much out of feeling anxious, insomnia and headaches. Over time though, his symptoms worsened and began to include tinnitus, dizziness, blurred vision, memory issues and trouble concentrating. He only slept on average four hours a night. The side effects of pain medication and muscle relaxers made them intolerable. He turned down antidepressants due to their unwanted side effects. Psychotherapy seemed a waste of time because he could not see how it was going to help his symptoms. It took a lot of self-discipline to get through the day.



It was only through a conversation with friends over dinner and talking about his symptoms and treatment that we realized Brian probably had mTBI. His symptoms were identical to his friend’s symptoms who had been diagnosed. He told us about a facility in Texas where he went for non-traditional medical treatment under the care of highly-specialized neurologic chiropractors that really helped him. They were having clinical success in improving symptoms of mTBI in veterans with their neurologic treatment program using no pharmaceuticals. We were not sure how we were going to pay for it but the facility said just come and they would help us find funding. They found a private foundation willing to give him a grant for his treatment, lodging and transportation.

In March of 2015, with much skepticism, he went for two weeks and received intense treatment that focused on the vestibular system and used electrophysiological techniques and neurostimulation that targeted areas of the brain that were not functioning properly. After the fourth day of treatment, he slept seven hours that night and symptom improvement continued in the following days. These doctors took a whole-body approach to his treatment by also looking at his bloodwork and diet, suggesting inflammatory foods to avoid that were most likely contributing to his symptoms and included supplements to aid in recovery.



This treatment turned Brian around and gave him hope that he had some control over his health. He followed up back home with 40 hyperbaric oxygen chamber treatments (HBOT) at Hampton Roads Hyperbaric in Norfolk, Virginia. He started taking an interest in things again. He began working out again and trained to compete and become a finisher in the 2018 Molokai to Oahu World Championship Paddleboard Race as part of a three-man, all-veteran SUP team.

The treatment made such a difference in his life that in December of 2015, we saw a need in our community and started Coastal Authority Care Foundation. Most people cannot take extended time off work to travel to a facility for treatment and there is a high concentration of veterans who stay in the Hampton Roads area after retirement. We work with local practitioners who offer cutting-edge treatments like Brian received that put him on the road to recovery.

**WHAT WE SUPPORT:** We are currently supporting HBOT and neurotherapy for veterans with mTBI/PTSD as these illnesses, along with major depression, go hand-in-hand. Existing studies show HBOT can dramatically and permanently improve symptoms of chronic mTBI months or even years after the original injury. Neurotherapy is showing promising results for mTBI and PTSD as well and has been used since the 1970's for anxiety, epilepsy and attention deficit. However, neither treatment is currently FDA-approved for mTBI, PTSD or major depression (the most common injuries in veterans) and insurance does not reimburse treatment costs.

**URGENCY:** Many service members, especially special operators, have multiple concussions by the time they retire or separate from service with symptoms that are compounded by the stress of retirement and finding a new job as a civilian. These symptoms, combined with lack of sleep, make it difficult to stay focused and engage with family, work and activities. Tempers get short. Family relationships deteriorate. Marriages brake up. They feel isolated and hopeless. It's a complete tragedy that veterans are taking their own lives when there are treatments that can help now. If we can help one veteran from being one of the 22, it's worth it.



The VA and DoD have studies underway looking at the effectiveness of HBOT and neurotherapy for mTBI and PTSD. In the meantime, until these become approved treatments that are covered by insurance, we are doing our work to raise money to help veterans in need of treatment *now*. We have helped local veterans and veterans who were stationed here and want to travel back for HBOT and/or neurotherapy because it is not available where they live with treatment, travel and lodging costs.

Our story is common among veterans (especially special operators) and their families. Those affected often find it difficult to talk about their invisible wounds due to fear of appearing weak. Fortunately, we were able to find help and we want to help others find symptom relief to restore quality of life, keep families together and help prevent veteran suicide.

- *Jill Crist*