

Testimony of Briana Scurry
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Congressional Brain Injury Taskforce
"Women and Traumatic Brain Injury: A Frontier Yet to be Explored"
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Hello, my name is Briana Scurry, I am 44 years old. I proudly served as the starting goalkeeper for the United States Women's National Soccer team from 1994 – 2008. During that time I played in 173 International games and won Olympic gold medals in the 1996 Atlanta and 2004 Athens Games. After my retirement from International play, I continued my professional club soccer career with the Washington Freedom from 2009-2010.

On April 25th, 2010 my life changed forever. I suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury during a game that abruptly ended my beloved soccer career. That was nearly 6 years ago.

I'm here today to help press the envelope on mining more TBI data on women specifically, so that those who treat, know, care for, and love TBI survivors like me can have an educated understanding of what's happening.

In the summer of 1999, my 20 amazing teammates and I captured the hearts of America when we won the World Cup by beating China in a penalty kick shootout in front of 90,000 screaming fans at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, CA. I was the one that made the single save during the penalty kicks. My teammates and I went on to become "America's Sweethearts." I'll bet many of you recall exactly where you were at that moment 17 years ago.

This past summer 23 women, several of whom were inspired by our epic win in 1999, rocked the soccer world by becoming the first women's soccer team on earth to win a 3rd World Cup title. 37 million American fans watched, many of you in this room, I'm sure, were among them. My passion and my mission was soccer, and I am forever honored and proud of the contribution and inspiration my team and I made on and off the field. My ultimate reward was living my dreams and inspiring the dreams of countless others.

After the concussion, everything changed. I struggled with intense piercing headaches that were so bad that by the evening it was all I could do to not cry myself to sleep. I had to take naps on a daily basis because my sleep was so disrupted, I couldn't concentrate, and I was moody. I felt disconnected from everything and everyone. I was anxious and depressed every day and I wondered if I'd ever get better.

The next 3 years after the concussion were far from rewarding and inspiring. I became a mere shell of the World Champion that everyone remembered me to be. Far from the woman that was capable of focusing on a single panel on a soccer ball while 90,000 people watched in anticipation with baited breath. Instead I had searing headaches, insomnia, and depression so deep I could barely get off the couch during the worst of it. I barely recognized myself in the mirror.

In September 2013, I moved to DC to have bilateral occipital nerve surgery at Georgetown to eliminate severe headaches that plagued me daily. Fortunately, the surgery was a Godsend for me, as my headaches were no more. However, it was only the beginning of my recovery.

For the next year I was in therapy to treat symptoms such as lack of concentration, balance issues, memory loss, anxiety, and depression. Finally, on October 6th, 2014, I was “fired” by my much beloved doctor, Kevin Crutchfield, and told I was finally free to “live again”. I know from my experiences of the last 18 months that I am one of the lucky ones.

While preparing for surgery in September 2013 I was alarmed to learn that the number of reported concussions in soccer was 2nd highest in the United States, with only American football having more cases at that time. Additionally, I read an article that stated that 1 of 2 female youth soccer players will suffer a concussion while playing. I figured the numbers of reported cases were likely understated and probably didn't account for those who've suffered multiple concussions. It was right then that everything changed again.

I had discovered a new mission, a new declaration. Or maybe it “discovered” me.

With my horrible TBI saga fresh in my heart, my desire to make it into something positive, and the articles I had read, I decided that my mission would now be to provide a new face and voice to those who have and may suffer the long and difficult recovery of a devastating Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)/concussion.

Not just any face, a female face. Not just any voice, a female voice. Statistics like the ones I just mentioned have solidified my urgency of purpose to shed light on the high frequency of concussions in women and the devastating emotional toll that prolonged symptoms often cause, yet are too frequently dismissed.

For nearly 3 years I've purposely and intentionally had my concussion devastation and recovery story documented by media outlets such as the USA Today, The Washington Post, Brainline.org, The Philadelphia Enquirer, and PBS News Hour in order to bring attention and a ray of hope to those suffering from TBI, like me.

I have spoken candidly and openly, often through tears, about my TBI experience at national conferences and summits, at various colleges and universities, to doctors, parents, athletes, coaches, other TBI survivors, and yes, even Congress.

I have aligned myself with corporations and organizations that are on the cutting edge of research, education, and awareness to help bring new technologies, ideas, and understanding to and about the TBI space. So those with TBI, their doctors, and caregivers could manage brain health more effectively.

I realized that I not only wanted to raise awareness for TBI, but for the prevalence of misdiagnoses as well. In my speeches I describe being “in the wilderness” for nearly 3 years before meeting Dr. Crutchfield in 2013. How countless doctors told me I wasn't suffering from post-concussion syndrome because it had been too long. How doctors said it was all “in my head,” told me “I look fine,” and that I'd better get used to it because my current state was how my life was going to be from now on. Thank goodness I didn't believe any of them and after years of searching, finding, and treatments I WAS ME AGAIN.

Once I got better, I was angry. Angry at all the misdiagnosis and time that was wasted by the doctors that had “seen” me before Dr. Crutchfield. I'm still angry, to a degree, and frequently mention in my

speeches where doctors are present that they should be willing to say, "I don't know, but I will contact another doctor that might be able to help."

This is better for the patient than saying diminishing comments or making the patient feel like they are crazy. Some doctors understand this some don't, but I persist. Then out of the blue it dawned on me that some of these conclusions may have been based solely on recovery time data gathered from men.

I sincerely hope that my presence here today will inspire increased awareness, understanding, and assistance to help the thousands of female TBI survivors across this country now and in the future.

I thank you all for allowing me to give my testimony.

I am grateful and humbled to have been invited to do so, and I look forward to your questions.