

Trying to reach out to world's

UCLA psychiatrist seeking \$280,000 to start facility for

By Jeff Gottlieb
Herald staff writer

Dr. Louis Jolyon West sits in his book-lined UCLA office, with a small bust of Sigmund Freud on a shelf. Yards away, college students dressed in the hippest Guess jeans and red Reebok shoes wander between classes.

The torturers of Vietnam, Iran, South Africa, Chile and El Salvador may be thousands of miles away, but it is the victims of their atrocities who concern West at the moment.

Many of those victims are not half a world away, but living in Southern California after fleeing their tormentors. Mental health professionals have found that many of the torture victims are suffering from the same psychological syndrome found among Vietnam veterans — post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

Few torture victims receive help for the deep emotional trauma they have suffered.

But West hopes to change that and establish the Center for Traumatic Stress Disorders at UCLA that will provide them specialized therapy. There are some programs in Southern California to treat torture victims, but none with the resources of a major university.

West, chairman of UCLA's Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences and director of the university's Neuropsychiatric Institute, envisions the UCLA center as a leader in the field.

"That we haven't done anything yet is regrettable," he said. "We should establish a center of this type as a national demonstration project and other parts of



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the country should send people here to get trained."

The center will be modeled after a pioneer facility in Denmark West visited several years ago and another in Toronto. Another center recently opened in Minnesota.

West's proposal for the UCLA facility includes a budget of \$280,000. He is optimistic he will receive a grant from the National Institutes of Health to fund the center. He hopes someone will donate a building to house it.

"I'd have it in a big old house," West said. "I'd prefer something not looking like an institution. This place looks enough like a prison that a person with PTSD wouldn't

want to come within 100 miles of the place."

Many of the immigrants who flow into Southern California are fleeing the torturers running their homelands. Torture remains government policy in about 60 countries, one-third of the world's nations, according to Amnesty International. Others, such as survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, may be suffering still from their experiences of long ago.

The American Psychiatric Association recognized post-traumatic stress disorder as an illness in 1980. The syndrome did not suddenly appear in Vietnam veterans. It had been around for years but no one had labeled it. PTSD symptoms include flash-

tortured

atrocities victims

backs, sleep disorders, emotional numbness, trouble concentrating and paranoia, which are caused by an outside factor, such as torture or witnessing a horrible event.

"It can develop from a wide variety of stimuli," said Glenn Randall, a UCLA physician who has treated torture victims. "If you see your village destroyed or see your family executed or if you are tortured or if you see other people tortured. They all might give you PTSD."

Many PTSD victims were tortured in countries that are U.S. allies — such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, Chile and Iran under the Shah.

Neither their origin nor their immigration status matters to West. "Most of these torture victims are the impecunious and the neglected," he said. "They're all patients."

West, 61, is a big man whose once-red beard is turning gray. He characterizes his psychiatric career as "a 35-year adventure." He examined Jack Ruby, the killer of Lee Harvey Oswald. He testified that kidnapped heiress-turned bank robber Patricia Hearst was a victim of extreme PTSD.

"She was a person who was obviously tortured and made subservient," he said. "Hell, she was no longer a normal girl."

He said the work with torture victims also can help other trauma targets, such as those who have suffered rape or child abuse.

"Certain types of victims suffer like torture victims," he said. "Torture victims' suffering should not prove to be in vain. We should learn how better to help others and how to protect others from this damage."