



IONIZING RADIATION REVIEW

Vol. 2, No. 1 *Information for Veterans Exposed To Ionizing Radiation* December 2004
and Their Families

Review of the Dose Reconstruction Program for Atomic Veterans

In 2003, the independent, nongovernmental National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academies of Sciences issued a report on the radiation dose reconstruction program of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) that provides estimates of the amounts of radiation exposure received during past events. The NRC report concluded that some upperbound doses may have been underestimated and identified other issues relating to adjudication of claims from atomic veterans.

In followup to the findings in the NRC report, Congress enacted Public Law 108-183, which required the Department of Defense (DoD) and the VA to jointly review the dose reconstruction program and submit a plan for corrective actions. The report of the mandated review and plan was submitted to Congress in June 2004.

The law also mandated establishment of a new independent advisory board to provide oversight to the dose reconstruction process and related activities. DoD and VA current are in the process of establishing this board. Additional information about this board will be provided in future issues of this newsletter.

What is the Ionizing Radiation Registry?

The Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR) is a service program offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for veterans who were exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service.

Atomic veterans are eligible to participate in VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry. Under this program, VA provides a complete physical examination for each veteran who requests it who served with the U.S. occupational forces in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, was a POW there, participated in atmospheric nuclear weapons testing, or was exposed to ionizing radiation while participating in another "radiation risk" activity as defined in VA regulations. Veterans need not be enrolled for general VA health care to be eligible for the Registry.

Approximately 23,800 veterans have participated in this program, offered at virtually all VA medical centers throughout the Nation.

Public Law 99-576, the "Veterans Benefits Improvement and Health Care Authorization Act of 1986," enacted October 28, 1986, required VA to establish and maintain an Ionizing Radiation Registry for veterans exposed to radiation. Public Law 105-368, the "Veterans Programs Enhancement Act," enacted November 11, 1998, states that VA may provide a medical examination, hospital care, medical service, and nursing home care that VA's Secretary finds may be associated with the veteran's nasopharyngeal (NP) radium irradiation treatments received while in the active military, naval, or air service.

The IRR consists of physical examinations combined with supplemental data on compensation claims and radiation exposures from the Veterans Benefits Administration (an agency within VA) and Department of Defense (DoD) agencies. VA compiles and consolidates all pertinent information maintained by VA and DoD. The Registry includes a medical history, physical examination, and baseline laboratory tests. Additional specialized tests and consultations are provided as medically required. This program also serves as an entry point for veterans into VA care.

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Veterans should be advised that the examination or treatment for radiation-related diseases does not constitute a formal claim for compensation. Although the results of an IRR examination may be used to support a compensation claim, the examination will not, in and of itself, be considered such a claim.

Veterans who wish to submit a claim for conditions possibly related to radiation exposure should do so via the normal claims process at the nearest VA regional office, or through a veterans services representative at the nearest VA medical center.

Ionizing Radiation Registry Statistics

Examinations by Year

Year/Number of Exams

2000 – **170**

2001 – **269**

2002 - **448**

2003 – **650**

First 9 months 2004 – **415**

Totals Since Establishment –

23,772 total examinations (includes followups examinations)

22,810 initial examinations (only one per person)

Total Eligible for Examination -- Approximately 400,000

Revised Poster Highlights Program, Provides Local Information

A new poster has recently been printed and distributed by the VA's Environmental Agents Service (which also produces this newsletter).

The poster, which is about 15 ¾ x 19 ½ inches, declares "VA CARES About Veterans Exposed to Ionizing Radiation."

The poster explains that if you are a veteran and were exposed to ionizing radiation in certain specified locations or under certain circumstances, VA has programs designed to help you. It mentions the various initiatives and programs, including the Ionizing Radiation Registry health examination, medical care, disability compensation, outreach and education, research, and testing for depleted uranium.

About the "Ionizing Radiation Review"

The "Ionizing Radiation Review" is written by VA's Environmental Agents Service to provide information to former military service members who may have been exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service. The "**Review**" describes the possible long-term health consequences of such exposure and VA's program to respond to this health risk.

The newsletter is intended to help provide information to veterans and their families concerned about the health risks of exposure to ionizing radiation in military service.

This is the second issue of the "**Ionizing Radiation Review**" newsletter. The initial issue carried a February 2004 date. We anticipate publication once or twice annually, depending on the amount of news on this subject, budgetary considerations, and interest. This newsletter was completed in mid-November 2004, and does not include developments that occurred after that time.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for future issues are encouraged and can be sent to the editor of the Ionizing Radiation Review, Donald J. Rosenblum, Deputy Director, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of the newsletter should also be sent to Mr. Rosenblum. Supplies are limited. Please specify the quantity and issue date requested.

Current and back issues of the "Reviews" are posted on the Internet at www.va.gov/irad.

Veterans are encouraged to contact the nearest VA medical center, Vet Center, or VA regional office for information and assistance. There is a box on the poster for local contact information.

The poster also includes the national toll-free telephone number for information (**1-800-827-1000**) and our Internet address (www.va.gov/irad).

Benefits and Services for U.S. Military Veterans Living Outside the U.S.

VA provides benefits and services to veterans overseas; however, these benefits and services are provided in a different manner than for veterans who live in the United States.

VA will pay for medical services for treatment of service-connected disabilities for veterans who are living or traveling in foreign countries. Authorization and payment for medical treatment of service-connected disabilities for these veterans are completed by VA's Foreign Medical Program (FMP) located in Denver, Colorado. The FMP address is: P.O. Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-9021.

There are some exceptions. Veterans living in Canada should contact the VA Center in White River Junction, VT 05009-0001, and veterans living in the Philippines should contact the U. S. VA Office, 2201 Roxas Blvd., Pasay City 1300, Philippines. Veterans living in Mexico, South and Central America, and the Caribbean should file a claim with the Houston Regional Office at 6900 Alameda Road, Houston, TX 77030. Veterans living overseas in countries not listed above should contact the Pittsburgh Regional Office, 1000 Liberty Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

Veterans and their dependents living overseas can also contact the Foreign Benefits Unit (FBU) in the United States Embassy in the country they are living for assistance. FBU staff can assist veterans and their dependents in filing VA benefit claims and in answering VA benefit questions.

VA regional offices are responsible for processing and establishing service-connected conditions, pension ratings and other benefit programs. Veterans and their dependents can also find information about VA benefits and services provided overseas online: www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/foreign/index.htm.

This web site provides valuable information about VA's Foreign Service Program, and it also enables the inquirer to ask questions, receive answers, and to apply online for a number of VA benefits.

Questions & Answers

The "Review" occasionally includes a questions-and-answers section in which VA officials respond to inquiries from readers regarding ionizing radiation and related matters. The first question comes from Barbeton, OH; the next two from Madison, WI.

Neil S. Otchin, M.D., Program Chief for Clinical Matters, Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, provided answers to the following questions:

Q: What are the bone pain symptoms associated with radiation?

A. The radiation doses that the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) has estimated most Atomic Veterans received should not cause any bone pain symptoms. However, if the radiation caused a cancer, then bone pain symptoms could occur.

Q: Why is prostate cancer not listed as presumptively service connected?

A. Congress did not specifically include this disorder in legislation establishing presumptions for atomic veterans. (Presumption means that VA automatically recognizes a connection between the exposure and the illness and that the veteran does not need to prove it.) While urinary tract cancers are considered presumptive for atomic veterans, VA considers prostate cancer to be a type of male genital cancer rather than a urinary tract cancer. From a scientific standpoint, the prostate is considered to have very low or absent relative susceptibility to induction of cancer by radiation.

Q: Why is plutonium assay not mentioned in the comprehensive physical exam?

A. While the DTRA did a pilot study measuring plutonium in atomic veterans, this study has now been concluded, and assays are no longer included in this examination. The DTRA may be contacted by calling toll-free **800-462-3683** for more information.

WRIISCs Offer Hope Combat Veterans With Unexplained Illnesses

VA health care providers occasionally see combat veterans with multiple unexplained symptoms or difficult-to-diagnose illnesses. Two VA centers offer specialized evaluations for combat veterans with disabilities related to these illnesses.

In May 2001, then Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi approved two new War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers - WRIISCs (pronounced “risks”). The WRIISCs opened at the VA Medical Centers in Washington, DC, and East Orange, NJ. Veterans who were deployed to combat zones, served in areas where hostilities occurred, or were exposed to environmental hazards, including ionizing radiation, may be eligible for services.

A referral for services at a WRIISC can be made after a veteran has had a comprehensive medical evaluation at his or her local VA Medical Center. The veteran’s primary care provider must make all referrals to the WRIISCs. Information on the referral process can be found at www.va.gov/EnviroAgents.

The WRIISCs also have programs engaged in scientific research on deployment health questions, such as war related illnesses and injuries, risk communication regarding deployment related hazards, and outreach and education for VA patients and their families and health care providers.

VA Facilities Recognized for Outstanding Service to Veterans

In March 2004, the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards in VA Central Office sent the first Environmental Hazard Center of Excellence Awards to 13 field facilities.

The award, based on a nonscientific survey mailed in August 2003, gave selected veterans the opportunity to evaluate the Environmental Health Registry staff at VA medical centers and outpatient clinics. The veterans receiving the survey were those who had been involved in the Agent Orange, Gulf War, and Ionizing Radiation Registry programs.

According to Environmental Agents Service (EAS) Director, Dr. Mark Brown, the award was intended to “recognize outstanding service to veterans.” He also emphasized that the facilities that did not receive an award were not criticized. In fact, overall the responses were positive and those not chosen in this round of awards received many excellent reports from the veterans they serve.

The survey asked veterans to name a VA Registry clinician or coordinator that has provided them with “outstanding customer service.” However, respondents generally choose to acknowledge the facility rather than a particular individual.

The facilities received the new award certificate, entitled “Environmental Health Center of Excellence Award,” in recognition of the expertise, patience and dedication displayed by the VA staff. The exceptional centers were: VAMC, Boise, ID; VAMC Cheyenne, WY; VAMC, Durham, NC; VAMC Fargo, ND; VAMC, Fresno, CA; VAMC, Grand Junction, CO; VAMC Manchester, NH; VAOPC, Oakland Park, FL; W.G. (Bill) Hefner VAMC, Salisbury, NC; VAMC, San Francisco, CA; VAMC White River Junction, VT; VA Community Based OPC, Williamsport, PA; and VAOPC, Winston-Salem, NC.

The significance of the award and the uniqueness in which the recipients were chosen makes the award much more valuable. This was the first time veterans were given a survey that allowed them to evaluate the Registry services and staff of their medical center. Honorees were unaware of the survey and were overwhelmed to know that the award was based on the evaluation by veterans. “It makes the award much more meaningful,” said Daniel Duffy, VAMC’s clinical coordinator for Special Programs, in White River Junction, VT. For Cindy Force, Network Program Support Unit Manager/Environmental Health Coordinator of the VAMC in Durham, NC, the veteran’s input was a positive boost. “It makes you feel as though you’ve done your job well,” said Force.

Despite the surprise of the award, facilities are aware of their capabilities, which they attribute to the staff’s friendliness and knowledge. Jim Nelson, administrative officer of the VAOPC in Winston-Salem, NC, described the staff as “very personal and friendly with patients,” two essential qualities other facilities also associated with their success. The VAMC in Manchester, NH, takes great pride in positive feedback it has received. “We seldom have complaints,” said Timothy Dorgan, Eligibility Coordinator.

Recipients of the award also mentioned that because of their great staff, they feel confident that they will receive the award again. Program Assistant Marj Doescher, of the VAMC in Boise, ID, acknowledged the employees’ impressive work, and offered advice for other facilities. Doescher stressed the importance of being aware of programs; “knowing the program and being able to clarify is vital,” said Doescher.



Dr. Kurt Schlegelmilch, Director, VAMC poses with award winning team at Grand Junction.

A framed certificate marked with a gold seal was given to recognized facilities. The award was mailed to the director of each station with the request that it be displayed in an area where it could be easily recognized, preferably with the Agent Orange, Gulf War, and Ionizing Radiation posters and newsletters.

Due to the positive responses, the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards looks forward to conducting this survey and offering this special recognition again in the near future. "I felt it was a success, it was well received by coordinators," said EAS Program Analyst Michelle Foster.

Foster was responsible for arranging the survey and for announcing the results at the national EAS quarterly conference call. A survey is planned for next year and should continue in the upcoming years.

The above article was drafted by Connie Torres, 2004 Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) summer intern in EAS.

Women Veterans Are Eligible for the Same Benefits as Men

MYTH: *Women Can't Be Veterans Because They Didn't Serve in Combat.*

FACT: **Women who served in the military are eligible for the same benefits and services as men veterans.**

Many women who served their country in military service do not consider themselves veterans because they did not serve in combat. Consequently, they have not applied for benefits and services for which they are entitled.

In fact, in recent years, VA has established a wide range of special services to provide appropriate, timely, and compassionate health care services to women veterans. These include the range of services available to men, as well as, sexual trauma counseling, homeless women veterans programs, victims of domestic violence programs, and reproductive health care, including maternity care, and infertility evaluations.

Each VA medical center has a Women Veterans Program Manager to ensure that women veterans receive the proper attention. For additional information about these and other programs for women veterans, contact the Women Veterans Program Manager at the nearest VA medical center

or outpatient clinic or see the VA Web site: [www: va.gov/wvhp](http://www.va.gov/wvhp).

Ionizing Radiation Review Readers Survey Results

Seventy-five readers responded to our readers' survey published in the February 2004 issue of the "Ionizing Radiation Review." The survey asked readers what they thought of the "Review," if it met their needs, and if there were any changes that we could make to improve it. It also provided respondents the opportunity to include additional comments or suggestions.

About ninety percent of the respondents were extremely pleased with the "Review." They were pleased to see the recognition of the health problems encountered by some veterans exposed to ionizing radiation and for its reliable sources. "The VA is finally showing concern for the issues, rights and entitlements for Atomic Veterans," said C.A.W., of Pittsburgh, PA.

Approximately ten percent of the respondents provided negative feedback. Their reactions were, in part, due to needing more information was not included. One respondent commented that thorough scientific research should be considered before concluding that the effects of radiation are "negative."

Approximately eighty percent of the respondents agreed that the newsletter met their needs and described it as providing valuable information. They also found the contact information to be very helpful and mentioned that they would like to see it updated in future publications. "Its format and subjects covered are excellent," said W.G.H. of Cambridge, NY.

The remaining twenty percent of respondents felt that the newsletter did not provide them the information they were seeking. Other respondents stated that although adequate, if they had received this information sooner it would have been of greater use to them. P.G. of Lyons, GA, wrote, "Lots of good information, I wish I could have had it earlier."

Both those satisfied and dissatisfied with the newsletter offered suggestions for improvement. Most readers wanted to add to the newsletter. Several readers would like to see the future newsletter covering more health issues such as hypothyroidism and skin cancer. Respondents suggested that a list of symptoms associated with serious cancers would be helpful. Several respondents also wondered if their symptoms

were similar to those experienced by other veterans and suggested that a questionnaire would be the best way to find out.

In addition, readers hope that the following will be added for a more personal benefit: health effects on their children, individual cases to compare their own symptoms, and where to find records and atomic test shots.

While some respondents left the additional comments section blank or commended the newsletter, others used it to include their own questions and concerns. The following were the most common questions and concerns of respondents: Can I pass on problems to our children? Do all atomic veterans receive the "Ionizing Radiation Review?" What is the number of disability compensation cases (of radiation exposure)? Are now being served? What are the bone pain symptoms associated with radiation? (See comment on bone pain on page 3 of this issue.)

For additional comments or information concerning the newsletter, contact Mr. Donald Rosenblum, Deputy Director, Environmental Agents Service (131), ATTN: Radiation Review, VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420. Mr. Rosenblum appreciates the comments and suggestions and will incorporate as many as possible into future issues.

The above article was drafted by Connie Torres, HACU summer intern in VA's EAS.

Fact Sheet Series Under Development

A series of fact sheets known as "Ionizing Radiation Brief(s)" is currently being prepared by the Environmental Agents Service. Each stand alone fact sheet covers an aspect or concern of veterans who were exposed to ionizing radiation.

The Ionizing Radiation Briefs are modeled on the Agent Orange Briefs which provides information for and about Vietnam veterans and their families, and other veterans who may have been exposed to herbicides during their military service. The new Briefs are expected to due for atomic veterans and others exposed to ionizing radiation what the Agent Orange Briefs did for Vietnam veterans.

The Ionizing Radiation Briefs should be available in late December 2004 or soon thereafter. The following Briefs are expected to be available then:

- A1. General Information
- B1. Ionizing Radiation Registry
- B2. Special Health Care Eligibility of Atomic Veterans
- B3. Disability Compensation
- B4. Information Resources on Radiation Health Effects
- D1. Illnesses Linked to Ionizing Radiation
- E1. Radiation Dose Reconstruction – The Purpose, The Process
- E4. Depleted Uranium
- E5. Women Veterans Were Exposed Too

Additional topics are planned. In the near future, veterans and others can get one or more of these Briefs from the Environmental Health Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center or from the Environmental Agents Service (131), ATTN: IR BRIEFS, at VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420. Also, the Briefs will soon be available at online at www.va.gov/irad.

Where to Go For Information and Help

Veterans concerned about their exposure to radiation and its possible long-term health consequences -- nearly every VA medical center offers the VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry health examination. Veterans who were exposed to radiation during their military service are encouraged to participate in this voluntary program. Call the nearest VA medical center for an appointment. The telephone number should be included in your local telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings. VA medical centers have designated an Environmental Health Clinician and an Environmental Health Coordinator. The Clinician performs (or supervises) the registry examination; the Coordinator is responsible for handling the administrative aspects of the program. For general information about VA health benefits and enrollment in the VA health care system, call **1-877-222-8387**. Veterans are not required to enroll in the system in order to receive the registry examination. To find out who the Environmental Health Coordinator and Clinician are, a veteran can contact the nearest VA medical center.

Veterans who need prompt medical treatment for conditions that may be related to their exposure to radiation during military service – contact the nearest VA medical center for eligibility information and possible medical treatment. Atomic veterans seeking care solely for health problems associated with exposure to radiation have been assigned to category six in the enrollment priorities system. Call the number above for information on this subject.

Veterans with illnesses incurred in or aggravated by exposure to radiation or some other aspect of

military service – contact a VA veterans services representative (VSR) at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility and apply for disability compensation. The national toll-free telephone number for information regarding VA benefits is **1-800-827-1000**. Also, VA applications are available on the Internet at vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp.

Veterans who encounter difficulties at a VA medical center – contact the Patient Advocate or Patient Representative at that facility for assistance in resolving the problem.

Representatives of various **Veteran Service Organizations**, including The American Legion (**1-800-433-3318**, www.legion.org), Paralyzed Veterans of America (**1-800-424-8200**, www.pva.org) Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (**1-800-VFW-1899**, www.vfw.org), Disabled American Veterans (**1-877-426-2838**, www.dav.org), National Association of Atomic Veterans (www.naav.com), and others have been very helpful to veterans exposed to radiation who are seeking disability compensation. The email address for the National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV) is www.naav.com. NAAV Commander William A. Harper's is pbharper@minspring.com. His telephone number is **480-895-0676**. NAAV Vice Commander Robert M. Campbell Jr. is hotdoc0@cox.net. Mr. Campbell's telephone number is **610-596-2234**. (These organizations are cited as examples. There are many other very helpful organizations. VA does not endorse or recommend any specific group over another.)

Country and State **Veteran Service Officers** also have been of great help to many military veterans.

Veterans Targeted by This Newsletter

This newsletter is primarily for veterans who were present during the construction and/or testing of nuclear weaponry, who served in the occupation of Japan shortly after World War II, who were exposed to depleted uranium. Plus, those individuals who participated in the following radiation risk activities:

at the Department of Energy gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, or K25 area at Oak Ridge, TN at least 250 days before February 1, 1992, and those present at underground nuclear tests at Amchitka Island, AK, before January 1, 1974.

And, of course, their families.



**Department of
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