



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OFFICE OF MARINE AND AVIATION OPERATIONS
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: RDML Philip Kenul
Director, Marine and Aviation Operations Centers

FROM: CAPT P. Jane Powers FNP-BC, MS, FAANP, USPHS
Director of Health Services
NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations

SUBJECT: DECISION: NOAA Tuberculosis Policy

The Director of Health Services, NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO), recommends that the attached document be adopted as the agency's official guidelines for the testing for tuberculosis. There is no official policy currently in effect at this time.

Discussion

On January 9, 2007, then RDML Samuel DeBow Jr., signed into effect a memo that required annual TB testing for all contract employees with supporting documentation (see Exhibit A attached). Annual TB testing is already a requirement for NOAA Corps Officers, wage mariners, cooperating scientists, USPHS Officers, visitors, and anyone else who wished to stay aboard a NOAA ship overnight or fly aboard a NOAA aircraft.

NOAA Health Services fields many questions related to TB testing on a regular basis. A little over a year ago I was asked by then Director of Health Services CDR JP Hendricks to develop a "patient education handout" with information relating to tuberculosis. When the final draft was submitted to CDR Hendricks, he stated that this "would be what we would go by" but did not want to have it posted anywhere or otherwise made available to those it would apply to. Consequently, our user base continued to have questions and continued to call the medical officers at the marine centers for advice.

Since the development of this first TB "patient education handout", a new test is being utilized more and more for the screening for TB. It was approved for use in the US approximately 5 years ago, and is called the QuantiFERON (QFT) test. The QFT is a blood test for TB. It has many benefits over the traditional tuberculosis skin test (TST or PPD) which include 24-hour results, increased specificity and sensitivity for the TB germ that causes disease in humans, no follow up visit is required for "reading the results", and it is not influenced by the boosting effect or the BCG vaccine (a vaccine to prevent TB used widely in other countries where TB is common). The results are used the same as with the TST.

This test does, however, have a few disadvantages. Not every medical laboratory is equipped to run the QFT and the cost varies but is around an average of \$35.00. Since the TST is only a



fraction of this cost and the two tests are used the same, it is my recommendation for NOAA to continue supply the PPD as we always have and not supply the more expensive QFT.

However, there have been an increasing number of requests for the QFT to satisfy the yearly TB requirement (in addition to the PPD) for the NOAA Health Services Questionnaire (NHSQ, a health history that must be completed by all non-crew members embarking on a NOAA vessel). I support this request which was the biggest reason behind the effort to create an "official" TB policy that could be publicized. We should accept the results of either test to satisfy our TB testing requirement on BOTC physicals, new hire physical exams, periodic physicals, or any other examination provided by the medical officers at the marine centers or from private medical providers elsewhere.

Since the development of this unofficial "patient education handout", it has been determined by our NOAA attorneys that we cannot require an HIV test. Consequently, that requirement has been removed from the attached new proposed policy titled "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Tuberculosis (And Some Things You Didn't Know)" which is Exhibit B. Prior to this presentation for approval, this document was reviewed by our contract group of physicians at George Washington University (Medical Faculty Associates or MFA) for completeness and medical accuracy and appropriateness. An informal review was also performed by Thomas R. Navin, MD, Chief, Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Outbreak Investigations Branch, Division of Tuberculosis Elimination, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for completeness and medical accuracy and appropriateness.

In addition, appropriate medical treatment protocols have been developed for addressing individuals who present with a positive, indeterminate, and negative TST and/or QFT. These are unique to the NOAA Health Services department and have also been reviewed by those mentioned above.

In summary, this decision memo is requesting endorsement/approval for:

1. Acceptance of the QFT to be used for TB screening (in addition to the approved TST)
2. Acceptance of the new NOAA TB policy written as an educational document for users for use, distribution, guidance, and posting titled "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Tuberculosis (And Some Things You Didn't Know)"
3. The QFT will not be offered and funded through the NOAA Health Services department

I respectfully request you endorse this proposal.

PMK Approve _____ Disapprove _____ Let's Discuss

6/23/8
Date