



Agent Orange Review

Vol. 2, NO. 2

Information for Veterans Who Served in Vietnam

June 1983

VA Reports on Medical Care For Vietnam Veterans

In recent testimony before a congressional subcommittee, VA Chief Medical Director Donald Custis reported on the medical care and treatment being provided for veterans under Public Law 97-72, the "Veterans' Health Care, Training and Small Business Loan Act of 1981."

Approximately 9,400 Vietnam veterans were admitted for inpatient care under this law during the period from February 1982 to February 1983. During this same period, approximately 369,000 Vietnam veterans made outpatient visits to VA health-care facilities.

More than 106,000 veterans have received initial Agent Orange examinations under the Agent Orange Registry program, which was begun in 1978. In addition, 24,500 follow-up examinations have been provided.

Public Law 97-72 authorizes VA to provide certain health-care services to any veteran of the Vietnam era who -- while serving in Vietnam -- may have been exposed to dioxin or to a toxic substance in a herbicide or defoliant used for military purposes.

VA is continuing to examine and treat Vietnam veterans in the Agent Orange Registry program and under Public Law 97-72. Any veterans who are concerned about possible adverse health effects of exposure to Agent Orange or who believe they are eligible for medical care under PL 97-72 should contact the nearest VA medical center or outpatient clinic.

Herbicide Advisory Committee Holds Meeting in May

VA's Advisory Committee on Health-Related Effects of Herbicides held its 16th quarterly meeting on May 20, 1983. Reports on recent VA Agent Orange-related activities were presented to the committee before the newly established subcommittees held their first meetings.

The Subcommittee on Veterans' Education and Information -- chaired by Fredrick Mullen, Sr., claims consultant, Paralyzed Veterans of America -- heard reports on current and planned VA

public information efforts. Subcommittee members also discussed Agent Orange issues of particular concern to Vietnam veterans.

Reports on VA's soft-tissue sarcoma study, the Australian birth defects study and VA's mortality study were discussed by the Subcommittee on Epidemiology and Biostatistics. The subcommittee is chaired by Dr. Richard Hodder, deputy director of the Division of Medicine at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Washington, D.C.

The full committee was briefed by the two subcommittees before opening the meeting to questions from the audience.

About the Review...

This issue of the "Agent Orange Review" contains information on:

- Medical care and treatment under Public Law 97-72,
- The recent Herbicide Advisory Committee meeting, and
- Updates on several research activities.

The "Review" is prepared by VA's Office of Public and Consumer Affairs and is published periodically throughout the year as part of VA's expanded program to provide information on Agent Orange to concerned veterans and their families.

For additional copies of this issue, write VA's Office of Public and Consumer Affairs (064), 810 Vermont Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20420.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list to receive the "Review," please send your name, complete address and social security number (if you are a veteran) to the VA Data Processing Center (200/392), 1615 E. Woodward St., Austin, TX 78772, Attn: Agent Orange Clerk. Changes of address should be forwarded to the same Austin address, *along with your mailing label.*

If you have any questions about your Agent Orange examination, contact the environmental physician at the VA medical center where you had the examination.

If you have questions about VA benefits or Agent Orange, Contact the VA facility nearest you. The phone number can be found in your telephone book under "U.S. Government" listings.



Agent Orange Research Update

NIOSH Dioxin Registry

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the research arm of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, is compiling a registry of industrial workers who have been exposed to dioxin.

Workers exposed during the industrial production of chemicals with TCDD as a by-product or those exposed in industrial accidents since the late 1940s will be included in the registry. NIOSH plans to include 6,000 workers in the study. As of May 1, 1983, 4,000 workers had been added. The remaining 2,000 are expected to be included by December 1983.

The registry will be used to compare mortality rates of exposed workers with national mortality rates.

Fourteen production sites have been identified, and information has been obtained at all but two sites.

Collection and analysis of all data is expected to be completed by March 1985. NIOSH expects to issue a report for public comment in mid-1985, with a final report available in the fall of 1985.

The health of workers on the registry will be evaluated at 5-year intervals.

VA Mortality Studies

The VA mortality studies, initiated in mid-1982, are designed to analyze and compare death rates and cause of death of veterans with Vietnam service and comparable veterans with no service in Vietnam.

The studies use existing VA computer records to identify a group of approximately 60,000 deceased veterans who served during the Vietnam era (1964-1975). Cause-of-death data will be obtained from death certificates, and histories of military service will be obtained from military records.

As part of the mortality studies, an independent validation of the VA computer records of veterans' deaths will be undertaken by the National Academy of Sciences.

The gathering of data is well underway. A pilot study of coding has begun involving 2,000 of the computer records. Data collection should be completed by December 1984.

VA Literature Review

VA has awarded a contract for preparation of an updated comprehensive review' and scientific analysis of the literature covering studies of the effects of herbicide exposure on humans.

The review will be based on an exhaustive compilation of the world's literature on the subject. More than 500 publications are expected to be reviewed.

The review will update the previous two-volume set entitled "Review of Literature on Herbicides, Including Phenoxy Herbicides and Associated Dioxins," which was published in 1981.

In addition to an analysis of the scientific literature that has appeared since the 1981 report, the updated review will focus on a number of more recent studies that pertain to herbicide exposure and health problems in humans.

The literature update and assessment is expected to be published in January 1984.

Vietnam Experience Twin Study

During January 1983, the Vietnam Experience Twin Study was placed in VA's Cooperative Studies Program, assuring support and assistance from VA's research community.

The proposed study will involve some 500 pairs of identical twin veterans -- one who served in Vietnam during the period of herbicide spraying and one who did not serve in Southeast Asia.

The study will attempt to determine whether the current psychological and physical health of Vietnam veterans was adversely affected by the Vietnam experience. Subjects will be given a battery of psychological, physiological and biochemical tests.

Methods for selecting, finding and recruiting the twins are currently being explored.

The twin study also will include a pilot effort to validate the proposed physical and psychological tests on a series of identical and fraternal twins who will not be part of the main study.

The researchers include an anthropologist/epidemiologist, a Board-certified internist and a clinical psychologist.

The study design is expected to be completed by October 1983. Study results are not expected for two to three years.

NO6-83-2

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