

November 27, 2002

Hon. Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Please find enclosed the annual report required by the charter of the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses. In accordance with the advice of VA central office senior staff, the annual report summarizes the activities of the Committee during the previous year. The Committee will be submitting further research recommendations following our next meeting, February 3-4, 2003.

The Committee enthusiastically welcomes Deputy Secretary Mackay's announcement that \$20 million is budgeted for Gulf War illnesses research in fiscal 2004 and his call to researchers that the time is ripe for new advancements in this area. The Committee's major recommendation from its October 28-30 meeting is that this information be publicized loud and clear throughout the VA system by every possible means. The message needs to reach VA doctors if we want to get back the best quality proposals.

We also reiterate the importance to research efforts of merging the DoD database on troop locations (US Army Services Center for Unit Records Research) into the VA Gulf War Master Record, maintained by the VBA, as recommended in our report of June 25, 2002.

Respectfully submitted,

James H. Binns, Jr.
Chair
Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses

cc: Deputy Secretary Leo Mackay
Laura O'Shea

Annual Report
Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses
December 1, 2002

1. Origin and Membership.

The Research Advisory Committee of Gulf War Veterans Illnesses was appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi on January 23, 2002, pursuant to Public Law 105-368. Committee members who have served during this initial year are listed on Appendix A. The Secretary simultaneously appointed an advisory panel of experts, who are listed on Appendix B.

2. Activities.

The Committee has held three meetings in Washington, D.C., on April 11-12, June 25, and October 28-30, 2002. Committee members have also devoted substantial time to Committee business outside of meetings, reviewing scientific literature, participating in information-gathering meetings with experts, and working with regular VA staff and other federal agencies. On June 25, 2002, the Committee presented a report to the Secretary containing initial recommendations.

3. Support Activities.

The administrative work of the Committee has been assisted by the Committee manager, Laura O'Shea, and members of her staff in Washington. The Committee scientific staff of 2.4 persons, including Committee member and scientific director, Beatrice Golomb, MD, PhD, has been established in San Diego to assist the Committee with its scientific work. It has also assumed responsibility for most administrative support. The scientific staff has prepared background papers on treatments, neurological and non-neurological mechanisms, and mitochondrial dysfunction, and made a presentation on vaccines, to facilitate Committee review and discussion.

The members of the expert panel have been provided copies of the Committee's June 25, 2002, report, including reviews of epidemiological and neurological studies regarding Gulf War illnesses. Conference calls were held with each expert panelist and members of the Committee to generate research ideas.

4. Accomplishments.

The Committee has sought to establish a working relationship with VA research officials. The goal of this effort is to ensure that the Committee's recommendations are well-informed by the latest thinking of the VA staff, and that the recommendations are practical and able to be acted upon. Members of the Committee have also held information-gathering sessions with representatives of the Department of Defense, the National Institute of Stroke and Neurological Disease, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Cooperation between Committee members, VA and DoD personnel resulted in the last-minute addition of questions regarding treatments to the Longitudinal Health Study of Persian Gulf War veterans, as recommended by the Committee.

The Committee was impressed by the VA leadership's response to its recommendations. At the Committee's October 30 meeting, Deputy Secretary Leo Mackay announced that the VA research budget for Gulf War and other deployment related illnesses would be increased to \$20 million in fiscal 2004, double that of any previous year. Dr. Mackay summoned the best researchers to bring their best ideas to bear on this long-standing problem. He noted that Gulf War illnesses is an area ripe for new discoveries, not only to improve the health of Gulf War veterans, but to protect American troops and civilians in the future. On October 18, 2002, the VA Research and Development organization issued a program announcement soliciting research proposals in this area.

The serious purpose of the new administration and the Research Advisory Committee is clear. By the standard set forth in its charter, however, neither the work of the Committee nor the research programs of the federal government have yet to "improve the health of ill Gulf War veterans."

Appendix A

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses

Chairman

James H. Binns, Jr., former Chairman, Parallel Design, Inc., Tempe, AZ; former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

Committee Members

Nicola Cherry, MD, PhD, Professor of Public Health Sciences, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

Beatrice A. Golomb, MD, PhD, Scientific Director, RAC-GWVI; Assistant Professor of Medicine, University of California, San Diego

Joel C. Graves, Army Gulf War veteran, Lacey, WA

Robert W. Haley, MD, Professor of Internal Medicine, Chief of Epidemiology, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, TX

Marguerite L. Knox, MN, NP, Senior Sales Representative, Neuroscience Division, Eli Lilly & Company, Columbia, SC

William J. Meggs, MD, PhD, Chief of Toxicology, The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

Pierre Pellier, MD, Vice President, Neurosciences, Global Medical Affairs, GlaxoSmithKline, Greenford, United Kingdom

Stephen L. Robinson, Executive Director, National Gulf War Resource Center, Silver Spring, MD

Steve Smithson, Assistant Director, Gulf War Task Force, American Legion, Indianapolis, IN

Lea Steele, PhD, Senior Health Researcher, Kansas Health Institute, Topeka, KS

Consultant to the Committee

Jack Melling, PhD, Director, Karl Landsteiner Institute for Vaccine Development, Vienna, Austria

Appendix B

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses

Expert Panelists

Ira B. Black, MD, Chair, Dept of Neuroscience and Cell Biology, UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Piscataway, NJ

Floyd E. Bloom, MD, Chair, Dept of Neuropharmacology, Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, CA

Joseph T. Coyle, MD, Eben S. Draper Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, Harvard Medical School, Belmont, MA

Eugene M. Johnson, Jr., MD, Professor, Dept of Neurology, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

M. Marsel Mesulam, MD, Director, The Cognitive Neurology and Alzheimer's Disease Center, Northwestern University Medical School, Chicago, IL

James J. Tuite, III, Chief Operating Officer, Chronix Biomedical, Inc., Benicia, CA

Bailus Walker, Jr., MD, MPH, Professor of Environmental and Occupational Medicine, College of Medicine, Howard University, Washington, DC