



# Persian Gulf Review

Vol. 4, NO. 1

*Information for Veterans Who Served in Desert Shield/Storm*

December 1995

## **National Health Survey Begins; Chosen Veterans Urged to Participate**

VA strongly encourages all Persian Gulf veterans who are selected by the research team conducting the "National Health Survey of Persian Gulf Veterans and Their Family Members" to participate in this epidemiology study. The survey is designed to accurately estimate how often symptoms and illnesses affect Persian Gulf veterans and their families.

Han K. Kang, Dr.P.H., Director, VA's Environmental Epidemiology Service, recently commented that the success of this project depends in large measure on the rate of participation. "We have carefully designed this survey to learn more about the health problems of Persian Gulf veterans, but we need the participation and cooperation of the individuals randomly selected to ensure valid results," Dr. Kang noted,

According to Dr. Kang, the study uses a mailed questionnaire to collect health information from a representative sample of about 15,000 Persian Gulf veterans. These data will be compared with information gathered from a similar number of Persian Gulf-era veterans who were not deployed to the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War. Some relatively small categories (example, women veterans) will be overrepresented to allow researchers to arrive at meaningful observations about them. On October 11, 1995, a "pre-notification letter" was mailed to the 30,000 veterans selected for participation. The actual questionnaire will be mailed on November 8, 1995.

A second representative sample of eligible respondents will be invited to undergo a physical examination to allow investigators to clinically evaluate the reported symptoms,

Persian Gulf veterans who are not selected to participate -- since about 697,000 individuals served in the Persian Gulf War, a very small minority are being asked to take part in the survey -- should not volunteer for the study. Participants must be scientifically selected to ensure the validity of this study. The survey is an important tool to better understand how many different types of illnesses occur and how often. It will provide a base for future research efforts.

## **Presidential Advisory Committee Holds a Series of Meetings to Gather Information on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses**

The Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, that President Clinton established by Executive Order 12961, on May 26, 1995, has held a series of

meetings to review and provide recommendations on the full range of government activities associated with Persian Gulf War veterans' illnesses.

(The April 1995 issue of the "Persian Gulf Review" describes the President's March 1995 announcement that he was establishing this Committee, noting its purpose. The August 1995 issue includes additional information about the Committee and the background and expertise of each member.)

The initial meeting was held on August 14-15, 1995, in Washington, DC. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton attended and made opening remarks, urging the Committee to "leave no stone unturned" in the quest for answers to the questions raised by Persian Gulf veterans and their families. Mrs. Clinton told the Committee about her meetings with Persian Gulf veterans who are ill. She reiterated the Administration's commitment to do whatever we can for such veterans.

The August 14 meeting also featured presentations by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, and Deputy Secretary of Defense John P. White. Several other officials from these departments and the interdepartmental Persian Gulf Veterans Coordinating Board also briefed the Committee. The afternoon was set aside to hear comments from the public, primarily veterans and their family members. Most of the public comments were very critical of governmental programs designed to serve participants of the Persian Gulf War.

On August 15, the Committee was briefed by representatives of the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine committees evaluating VA and Department of Defense (DOD) programs. The Committee then discussed their goals, objectives, and strategies. The initial Committee report is due in mid-February 1996. The final report must be completed by December 1996.

On September 18, 1995, a subcommittee or panel of the Committee met in Charlotte, NC, to discuss various clinical issues related to Gulf War veterans' illnesses. Army Reserve Captain Marguerite Knox, Clinical Assistant Professor in the College of Nursing, University of South Carolina, chaired the meeting. VA and DoD representatives provided briefings on health care services available to Gulf War participants. DoD also informed the panel about pre-deployment medical assessment activities. Public comments were received in the afternoon from a number of Persian Gulf veterans, primarily from North and South Carolina.

On October 18-19, 1995, the full Committee met for the second time. The meeting was held in Arlington, VA, a suburb of Washington, DC. On October 18, the Committee received a report on the September 18 panel meeting on clinical matters, discussed eligibility issues, listened to testimony concerning



the DoD Persian Gulf Investigative team (which looks into theories presented on the DoD "incidents" hotline - 1 800472-6719) and massive declassification efforts, and discussed outreach initiatives with representatives of VA, DoD. Committee staff, and several veterans groups. The following day the Committee received public comments from four Persian Gulf veterans, discussed strategy for review of implementation of recommendations made by other committees, and focused on research issues.

The next full Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for December 4-5, 1995 in San Diego, CA. A research panel meeting is planned for November 7 8, 1995 in San Francisco. Correspondence regarding the Committee's work and/or requests to be on the Committee's mailing list should be addressed to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, 1411 K Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20005. The telephone number is 202-761-0066. The fax number is 202-761-0310.

## About the "Review" ...

The "Persian Gulf Review" is written by VA's Environmental Agents Service (EAS). The "Review" is published to provide information about the concerns of Persian Gulf veterans, their families, and others interested in the possible long-term health consequences of military service in the Persian Gulf War. The "Review" describes actions by VA and others to respond to these concerns.

The most recent issue of the newsletter was printed in August 1995. Additional issues will be prepared when warranted by significant developments. EAS anticipates publication of the "Review" about four times annually. Four issues were published in 1995 (January, April, August, and December). This issue was written in early November 1995 and does not include developments that occurred after that time.

Comments or questions about the content of the "Review" are encouraged. Suggestions and ideas for future issues of the newsletter should be sent to Donald J. Rosenblum, Persian Gulf Review, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA National Headquarters, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of this issue should also be sent to Mr. Rosenblum. A limited supply of the February 1993, September 1993, September 1994, January 1995, April 1995, and August 1995 issues is also available. Please specify the quantity and issue dates requested. VA facilities should order additional copies from the VA Forms Depot.

Questions about the Persian Gulf Registry examination program should be directed to the Registry Coordinator or Registry Physician at the nearest VA medical facility. The telephone number can be found in the local telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings. Assistance is also available from the toll-free VA Persian Gulf Helpline: 1-800-749-8387.

## PG Referral Center Program Expands to Four Sites - Birmingham Added

In June 1995, Dr. Kenneth W. Kizer, VA Under Secretary for Health, announced the establishment of a fourth Persian Gulf Referral Center, to be located at the VA Medical Center in Birmingham, Alabama.

The referral centers were established to medically assist Persian Gulf veterans whose symptoms defy explanation through the usual diagnostic and therapeutic efforts of local VA medical facilities. The initial three referral centers were established in August 1992, when it became clear that increasing numbers of Desert Storm veterans appeared to be incapacitated and had symptoms which eluded routine medical diagnosis despite thorough medical work-ups at VA medical centers.

VA determined that for these veterans it is desirable to provide for inpatient stays to allow for observation, multidisciplinary consultation, documentation of lengthy occupational and exposure histories, and an opportunity for frequent re-examination. For such veterans, local VA medical centers make special arrangements for the transfer, following consultation with referral center clinicians, to the appropriate referral center.

The referral centers were selected based on availability of clinical and academic expertise in such areas as pulmonary and infectious diseases, neurology, immunology, neuropsychology and access to toxicologic expertise. The centers place an emphasis on specific symptom complexes, such as fevers of unknown origin, chronic fatigue, memory loss, unexplained weight loss and other adverse health conditions possibly associated with chemical/toxic environmental exposures in the Persian Gulf.

The initial three referral centers are located in Houston, Texas, Washington, DC, and West Los Angeles, California. The new center was established for several reasons. A center was needed in the Southeast region of the country, where a significant number of Persian Gulf veterans expressing health concerns reside. The VA Medical Center in Birmingham is the site of an important pilot project, initiated two years ago, evaluating certain neurological difficulties that might be associated with exposure to chemical agents. The staff there is very knowledgeable about Persian Gulf issues and sensitive to the concerns of these veterans.

The establishment of a fourth center is part of an expanded mission for the referral center program, under which these centers will follow-up and assist program participants long after they return home.

Approximately 240 Persian Gulf veterans were sent to referral centers during the first three years of operation.

## VA Persian Gulf Registry What is It? How Can One Register?

The VA Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Registry, often called the VA Persian Gulf Registry, is a list containing the

name of individuals who served as a member of the Armed Forces in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War who took certain action specified by Title VII, Public Law 102-585, the "Persian Gulf War Veterans' Health Status Act," enacted November 4, 1992.

The law indicates that Gulf War participants be included in this Registry if they (1) apply for health care services from VA, (2) file a claim for compensation from VA on the basis of any disability which may be associated with Gulf War service, (3) die and are survived by a spouse, child, or parent who files a claim with VA for dependency and indemnity compensation (survivors' benefits) on the basis of Gulf War service, (4) request a special VA Registry health examination (authorized by this law), or (5) receive from the Department of Defense a health examination similar to the VA Registry health examination and request inclusion in the VA Registry.

In addition to the names and addresses of these Gulf War participants, the VA Registry includes relevant medical data relating to the health status of many of these veterans. Accumulated medical data are useful to researchers developing hypotheses to be evaluated in scientific investigations. The Registry itself cannot be used in scientific research because its participants are self-selected and are not necessarily reflective or representative of the Persian Gulf veterans as a group,

Persian Gulf veterans cannot gain inclusion to the Registry merely by requesting to be added to the list. They must meet one of the five criteria cited above,

The Registry program began in August 1992 as a health examination program only, based on VA models used for Vietnam veterans concerned about Agent Orange exposure and veterans exposed to ionizing radiation during atomic weapons testing or during the occupation of certain areas in Japan at the close of World War II. With the enactment of Public Law 102-585, veterans who participated in the examination program became just one of five components of the full Registry. More than 53,000 Persian Gulf veterans have received the Registry health examination. More than 191,000 Persian Gulf veterans are currently on the full Registry.

This newsletter is sent to all veterans on the Registry. Various components of the Registry may also be used to selectively notify individuals of legal or policy/procedural changes that affect them.

Persian Gulf veterans who are interested in receiving the Persian Gulf Registry health examination should contact the nearest VA medical center for an appointment.

## **Persian Gulf War - Is the End in Sight ?**

The Persian Gulf War is a war with no end. On April 6, 1991, President Bush signed Public Law 102-25, which, among other things, established August 2, 1990 as the starting date of the "Persian Gulf War." The law indicates that the War would end "on the date thereafter prescribed by Presidential proclamation or by law."

August 2, 1990 was the day that Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait. U.S. troops began deployment in Operation Desert Shield five days later. Operation Desert Shield became Operation Desert Storm as Coalition air forces began the attack of Iraq on January 16, 1991. On February 24, 1991, the ground

war began for U.S. military personnel. One hundred hours later, on February 28, 1991, the fighting ended.

Approximately, 697,000 individuals served in the Armed Forces of the United States in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during that time period. About 945,000 servicemembers have served in this area from August 1990 through the end of 1994. We do not yet have data for 1995.

Approximately 505,600 of the 945,000 have become eligible for VA care as veterans, having either left the military or having become deactivated reservists or Guard members.

To date, no Presidential proclamation has been issued nor has any law been enacted to establish an ending date for the War.

### **Where to Get Help**

Active duty military personnel with questions or concerns about their service in the Persian Gulf region - contact your commanding officer or call the Department Of Defense (DOD) Persian Gulf Veterans' Hotline (1-800-796-9699) for an examination.

Persian Gulf veterans with concerns about their health--contact the nearest VA medical center. The telephone number can be found in the local telephone directory under Department of Veterans Affairs in the "U.S. Government" listings. A Persian Gulf Registry examination will be offered. Treatment will be provided to eligible veterans. The VA Persian Gulf Information Helpline can also provide the latest information and assistance. The toll-free telephone number is 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Persian Gulf veterans in need of marital/family counseling--contact the nearest VA medical center or VA vet center. For additional information, call the Persian Gulf Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Persian Gulf veterans seeking disability compensation for illnesses incurred in or aggravated by military service--contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility or call the VA Persian Gulf Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Persian Gulf veterans interested in learning about the wide range of benefit programs administered by VA --contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility, or call the VA Persian Gulf Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Individuals with first-hand information about "incidents" that occurred in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War that may be related to health problems experienced by individuals who served in the War--call the DoD "Incidents" Hotline at 1-800-472-6719.

Note: Representatives of veterans service organizations, including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Disabled American Veterans, etc., may also be very helpful to Persian Gulf veterans.

## Q's and A's

Future issues of the "Persian Gulf Review" will feature a question and answer section in which VA officials will respond to readers' inquiries regarding various concerns of Persian Gulf veterans. Questions should be sent to Donald J. Rosenblum, Environmental Agents Program (131 ), VA National Headquarters, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. We cannot guarantee that all questions received will be printed in the "Review."

# Persian Gulf Review



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Veterans Affairs**

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