



Gulf War Field Advisory Group Assists Headquarters in Review of Policies and Procedures

In November 1998, Kenneth W. Kizer, M.D., M.P.H., Under Secretary for Health, established the Gulf War Field Advisory Group to review and provide advice regarding the broad range of Gulf War-related veterans' programs offered by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the medical agency of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

This VA committee has been charged with providing advice to the Under Secretary for Health on an array of Gulf War issues related to the Gulf War Registry health examination program, Gulf War Referral Centers, clinic care, clinical demonstration projects, customer satisfaction, continuing medical education needs, health risk communication, and related matters.

VA Gulf War programs have been reviewed by numerous oversight groups, including several congressional committees and agencies, the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (IOM), the Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC) on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, and the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The national Field Advisory Group was established, in part, to assess the recommendations offered by these entities and to recommend appropriate actions, track progress, and promote improvement in VHA Gulf War programs. The Field Advisory Group will review the reports of the IOM, PAC, SIU, General Accounting Office, and others to ensure that necessary action is being taken.

The initial activities of the Advisory Group have included review and revision of the VA Registry examination protocol (in coordination with the Clinical Working Group of the White House-established Persian Gulf Veterans Coordinating Board), review of the Gulf War Referral Center program, annual review and site visits to the clinical demonstration projects, and review of the VA National Customer Satisfaction Survey results of Gulf War veterans.

Frances M. Murphy, M.D., M.P.H., Director, Environmental Agents Service, as well as Chief Consultant, Occupational and Environmental Health Strategic Health Group, is serving as the initial Chairperson of the committee. The other members are field personnel (including Registry physicians), plus representatives from the Department of Defense and the Persian Gulf Veterans Coordinating Board and the Chief Public Health and Environmental Hazards Officer.

The Advisory Group held its first meeting via telephone on March 23, 1999. The first face-to-face meeting is scheduled for June 21-22, 1999. The Advisory Group will submit an annual report of its activities to the Office of the Under Secretary for Health.

Annual Conference on Federally Sponsored Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Research to Be Held June 23-25

On June 23-25, 1999, approximately 500 Gulf War researchers and clinicians will convene in Arlington, Virginia, for a major conference on federally sponsored research on Gulf War veterans' illnesses.

The purpose and objectives of this conference, sponsored by the Research Working Group of the Persian Gulf Veterans Coordinating Board, is to bring together, in a common forum, researchers, clinicians, veterans, veterans' groups, and government officials to:

- Provide an opportunity for researchers to present and exchange study results;
- Provide an opportunity for veterans and veterans' groups to learn about ongoing research and to directly interact with researchers, clinicians, and government officials;
- Provide an opportunity to inform executive and legislative branches of the government about research and clinical initiatives related to the Gulf War that should be considered for future deployments;
- Inform clinicians of current practices for the treatment of Gulf War veterans' illnesses, and the latest research findings and their potential impact on clinical care;
- Learn from recognized experts in relevant areas of research about overarching research areas as they relate to the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of Gulf War veterans' illnesses; and
- Encourage communication, cooperation, and collaboration among researchers, clinicians, and veterans.

This is the fourth conference of its type. The first was held at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, DC, in 1995. There were approximately 50 participants at that meeting. The second conference was held at Fort Detrick, Maryland, in 1997. In June 1998, 274 individuals attended the third conference, which was held at the Doubletree Hotel in Arlington, Virginia, the location of this year's meetings.

At the 1999 conference, a mix of renowned scientists, physicians, and health care providers will address the audience during keynote and plenary sessions. In the afternoon, key leaders in the field will preside over "thematic platform sessions" with presentations drawn from submitted abstracts that highlight the work of Gulf War veterans' illnesses researchers. Additional abstracts will be displayed during poster sessions. Special symposia for healthcare providers will also be held.



Letter from VA Research Chief Appeals for Study Participants

The following is a letter from John R. Feussner, M.D., Chief Research and Development Officer, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), encouraging eligible Gulf War veterans to participate in large-scale clinical trials recently announced by VA.



Dr. John R. Feussner

April 15, 1999

Dear Gulf War Veteran:

As one of more than 700,000 Americans who served in the Gulf War, you know that a number of veterans of the conflict have suffered health problems marked by a variety of unexplained symptoms. Although neither a cause nor a single underlying disease process has been identified, the Department of Veterans Affairs is dedicated to studying and treating these ailments.

Recently the VA identified groups of patients who may benefit from possible therapies. Now VA is leading a \$20 million effort with the Department of Defense to conduct two separate major studies of possible treatments for the symptoms of the undiagnosed illnesses of Gulf War veterans.

If you are a veteran who meets the eligibility requirements, I encourage you to consider volunteering for one of these large-scale clinical trials as we seek ways to provide veterans with the best possible care and a high quality of life. To qualify to participate, veterans must have served in the Gulf War between August 1990 and August 1991 and must currently be suffering from at least two of three otherwise unexplained symptoms of a) fatigue, b) muscle and joint pain, and c) memory and thinking problems. The symptoms must have been present for more than six months.

One of the studies will test whether exercise and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)--separately or in combination--improve physical function. CBT teaches patients active techniques for reducing the severity of symptoms and is commonly used to enhance traditional treatments for many chronic conditions, including cancer, coronary artery disease, asthma, and a variety of conditions characterized by pain and fatigue. The 1,300 participants in the study will receive exercise training, CBT, a combination of the two treatments, or usual and customary care. All participants will receive care from specially designated clinics and will work with a single nurse specifically assigned to the study. If you would like to volunteer or learn more about this study, see the list on page 2 for the telephone number at the nearest participating medical center.

The second treatment trial, which will involve more than 400 volunteers, will test whether an antibiotic is effective in treating the illnesses reported by Gulf War veterans. One current theory is that infection with the microorganism *Mycoplasma fermentans* causes the symptoms veterans are reporting. Some veterans say that the antibiotic doxycycline helps to treat their conditions, but a large-scale scientific study is needed to properly test this therapy. Volunteers will receive

doxycycline or an inactive placebo orally for 12 months. To participate in this study, veterans must also have been suffering for six months or more from at least two of the three symptoms of fatigue, muscle and joint pain, or memory and thinking problems. Additionally, a test must show that they have a *Mycoplasma* infection. To volunteer for this study or to learn more, see the list on page 3 for the telephone number of the nearest participating medical center.

These two studies offer the prospect of significantly advancing our knowledge of the illnesses affecting veterans and our ability to treat the related symptoms. If you are eligible, you may wish to consider helping your nation once more by volunteering for one of these studies and supporting our effort to enhance the care and health of the men and women who served in the Gulf War.

Sincerely yours,

John R. Feussner, M.D.
Chief Research and Development Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs

Participating Sites Exercise/Behavioral Therapy Trial

VA Medical Centers

Albuquerque, NM(505) 265-1711, ext. 2587
Birmingham, AL(888) 820-1102
Boston, MA(617) 232-9500, ext. 5968
Brooklyn, NY(718) 630-2819
Burlington, VT(802) 864-4492
Dayton, OH(937) 268-6511, ext. 1212
East Orange, NJ(800) 248-8005
Fargo, ND(701) 239-3700, ext. 3502
Houston, TX(713) 794-7668
Philadelphia, PA(215) 823-5952
Portland, OR(503) 494-1104
Richmond, VA(888) 289-1632
St. Louis, MO(314) 289-6554
San Antonio, TX(210) 617-5300, ext. 4061
San Francisco, CA(415) 2214810, ext. 2287
San Juan, PR(787) 758-7575, ext. 5656
Seattle, WA(206) 764-2795
West Haven, CT(203) 932-5711, ext. 3990
White River Junction, VT(802) 295-9363, ext. 6052

DoD Medical Centers

Naval Health Research Center
San Diego, CA(619) 524-0069

Walter Reed Army Medical Center
Washington, DC(202) 782-6563

Participating Sites Antibiotic Treatment Trial

VA Medical Centers

Albany, NY(518) 462-3311, ext. 3080
Albuquerque, NM(505) 265-1711, ext. 2396
Augusta, GA.....(706) 733-0188, ext. 2305
Birmingham, AL(888) 820-1102
Boston, MA(617) 278,4416
Bronx, NY(800) 877-6976
Brooklyn, NY(718) 630-2819
Charleston, SC(843) 577-5011, ext. 7376
Dayton, OH(937) 268-6511, ext. 1212
Durham, NC(919) 286-6950
East Orange, NJ(800) 248-8005
Fargo, ND(701) 239-3700, ext. 3502
Houston, TX(713) 794-7543
Manchester, NH(603) 624-4366, ext. 6898
Milwaukee, WI(414) 384-2000, ext. 2760
Montgomery, AL(334) 272-4670, ext. 4466
Nashville, TN(615) 327-4751, ext. 7852
New Orleans, LA(504) 568-0811, ext. 5491
Oklahoma City, OK(405) 270-0501, ext. 3106
Omaha, NE(402) 977-5632
Philadelphia, PA(215) 823-5952
Providence, RI(401) 457-3045
Richmond, VA(888) 289-1632
Salt Lake City, UT(801) 582-1565, ext. 1466
San Francisco, CA(415) 221-4810, ext. 2287
San Juan, PR.....(787) 758-7575, ext. 3311
Tampa, FL(813) 974-0798
White River Junction, VT(802) 295-9363, ext. 6054

DoD Medical Centers

Naval Health Research Center
San Diego, CA(619) 524-0069

Walter Reed Army Medical Center
Washington, DC.....(202) 782-6563

Spouse/Children Examination Program Provides Health Information for Dependents

The health examination program for certain spouses and children of Gulf War veterans that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), established in April 1996, has provided valuable health status information to participants. Last year, with the enactment of Public Law 105-368, this program was expanded and extended through December 31, 1999.

To be eligible for participation, an individual must (1) be the spouse or child of a veteran who is (a) listed in VA's Gulf War Veterans Health Registry, and (b) suffering from an illness or disorder; (2) be suffering from, or may have suffered from an illness or disorder (including a birth defect, miscarriage, or

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If you have recently moved, please use this form to update our mailing list. Send the completed form to the Gulf War Review, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420. Thank you.

Your Name _____

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(Continued from left column) stillbirth which cannot be disassociated from the veteran's service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations; and (3) have granted VA permission to include in the Registry relevant medical data from the evaluation. The examinations have been provided at more than thirty locations.

In addition to extending the program, Public Law 105-368 provided for program improvements through "enhanced flexibility" by permitting examinations to be completed under a fee arrangement and providing for VA payment of certain transportation expenses. Due to the complexity involved in contracting for pediatric examinations and the great distance many spouses and children were travelling for examinations, VA now is allowing facilities the option of paying private providers to conduct the examinations. The veteran (or spouse) must still call the toll-free Helpline (1-800-PGW-VETS; 1-800-749-8387) to register for this program and confirm their eligibility. Please note that no payments can be made to private physicians unless the above requirements are met and the spouse or child is officially enrolled in the examination program.

When the veteran is notified of program enrollment by the coordinating facility, he or she may request that the examination be conducted by his or her private physician. Private physicians must agree to fill out all required VA forms to obtain payment. If reimbursement for travel is required, VA will provide payment at the same rate as beneficiary travel for veterans. Reimbursement of travel costs is processed in the same way as payment for the examination, that is, all reimbursements are paid by the VA Denver Payment Processing Center.

Questions about this program should be directed to the Gulf War Veterans Helpline (1-800-PGW-VETS; 1-800-749-8387). Individuals wishing to participate in the program should call this toll-free telephone number. No treatment is available for

illnesses detected in this program. Authority for the program was initially established in Public Law 103-446. It was extended by Public Law 104-262, and, as noted above, most recently by Public Law 105-368, the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998, signed by President Clinton on November 11, 1998.

Meetings Focus on Gulf War Concerns

A number of recent and upcoming meetings have focused on the varied concerns of Gulf War veterans and their families. This article highlights the important meetings held during the past few months or are scheduled for June. It is not intended to be inclusive.

February 28-March 2, 1999 - Research Planning Conference on the Health Impact of Chemical Exposures During the Gulf War; Sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia.

March 18, 1999 - National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine Committee to Study VA Plan for a Center for Post War Illnesses; Meeting held in Washington, DC.

March 23, 1999 - Gulf War Field Advisory Group; Initial meeting of group (see article on page 1); via telephone.

April 22, 1999 - Special Oversight Board for Department of Defense Investigations of Gulf War Chemical and Biological Incidents; San Antonio, Texas.

April 22, 1999 - House Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations held a hearing on the provisions in Public Law 105-277 related to Gulf War veterans.

April 27-28, 1999 - National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine Committee on Health Effects Associated with Exposures Experienced During the Gulf War; Meeting held in Washington, DC; Earlier meetings of this committee were held on January 11-12, 1999, and February 16, 1999.

May 4, 1999 - VA Environmental Agents Service Quarterly National Telephone Conference Call with Registry physicians, Registry coordinators, and other VA medical center personnel involved in Gulf War issues.

June 14-15, 1999 - National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine Committee on Health Effects Associated with Exposures Experienced During the Gulf War; Scientific Workshop and Committee Meeting.

June 21-22, 1999 - Gulf War Field Advisory Group; First face-to-face meeting; Washington, DC (see article on page 1).

June 23-25, 1999 - Conference on Federally Sponsored Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Research; Arlington, Virginia; (see article on page 1).

Bonus for Minnesota Gulf War Veterans - Correction

Occasionally, the Gulf War Review includes information about State programs on behalf of Gulf War veterans. State programs can send relevant information to the Gulf War Review, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

Minnesota military veterans of the Gulf War have until June 30, 1999, to file applications to receive a State bonus for their military service. For information, call the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs at **612-296-2562**. The telephone number included in the March 1999 issue of the "Review" was erroneous. We apologize for any inconvenience.

About the Review...

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

The most recent, prior to this, issue of the newsletter is dated March 1999. Additional issues will be prepared when warranted by significant developments. EAS anticipates publication of the "Review" three or four times annually. Four issues were published in 1995 (January, April, August, and December), three in 1996 (March, September, and December), three in 1997 (March, June, and September), and four in 1998 (March, June, October, and December). This issue is the second for 1999. It was completed in May 1999 and does not include developments that occurred after that time.

Comments or questions concerning the content of the "Review" are encouraged. Suggestions and ideas for future issues of the newsletter should be sent to 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 this and/or future issues should also be sent to Mr. Rosenblum. A limited supply of issues released in 1995-99 is available. Please specify the quantity and issue date requested. VA facilities should order additional copies from the VA Service and Distribution Center.

Questions about the Registry examination 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 Gulf War Helpline: 1-800-749-8387.

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) Gulf War Veterans' Hotline (**1-800-796-9699**) for an examination.

Gulf War 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 Gulf War Registry examination will be offered. Treatment will be provided to eligible veterans. The VA Gulf War Information Helpline can also provide the latest information and assistance. The toll-free telephone number is **1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**.

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

Gulf War 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 at **1-800-827-1000**, or call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at **1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**.

Gulf War veterans seeking participation for their spouses or children in the VA-funded health examination program for spouses and children - call

the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at **1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**.

Veterans interested in the alternative self-funded examination for spouses or children - contact the Gulf War Registry Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center for forms and information.

Gulf War 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 at **1-800-827-1000** or call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at **1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**.

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

For additional information about VA's program initiatives, see VA's Gulf War veterans' illnesses home page at **<http://www.va.gov/gulf.htm>**.

Gulf War veterans who encounter difficulties at a VA medical facility can contact the "**patient advocate**" at that facility for assistance in resolving the problem.

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 Gulf War veterans, especially veterans who are seeking disability compensation.

Gulf War Review

*Information for Veterans
Who Served in Desert Shield/Storm*
June 1999



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