



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420

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In Reply Refer To: 13

September 23, 2002

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER

**PATIENT REFERRAL ELIGIBILITY FOR VA WAR-RELATED ILLNESSES AND
INJURY STUDY CENTERS (WRIISC)**

1. This Under Secretary for Health's Information Letter provides information to clinicians for referring combat veterans with difficult-to-diagnose debilitating illnesses to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)'s War-Related Illnesses and Injury Study Centers (WRIISC).

2. Background

a. In May 2001, VA announced the opening of two new WRIISCs at the VA Medical Center Washington, DC, and VA Medical Center East Orange, NJ. These new centers are responsible for responding to difficult-to-diagnose, but debilitating, illnesses that are seen in some veterans following all military deployments (for referral information see the VA web site at: www.va.gov/environagents). The WRIISCs follow a strong VA tradition of developing new programs that address special health care needs of veterans, including VA's National Center for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), VA's Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Centers (GRECCs), VA's Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs), and VA's Vet Center Program.

b. In addition to specialty clinical care for combat veterans with difficult-to-diagnose disabling illnesses, the two new WRIISCs are also charged with developing new research on new treatments for such patients; education for patients and VA health care providers who will work with these patients; and risk communication on war-related illnesses targeted toward patients and their families.

3. Eligibility for WRIISC Referral

a. The clinical focus of the WRIISCs is providing specialized care for combat veterans who suffer from difficult-to-diagnose illnesses that may be associated with their military service (see web site at: vawww.va.gov/environagents). To determine veterans' eligibility as a combat veteran, VA will rely upon the same citation and criterion used to determine eligibility for readjustment counseling at VA Vet Centers, as authorized by Title 38, United States Code, Section (U.S.C.) 1712A and operationally defined in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive 97-002. According to that directive, a positive determination in any of the following criteria indicates eligibility as a combat veteran:

(1) Any veteran who served in a theater of combat operations during World War II and is eligible for one or more of the following three campaign medals:

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(a) The European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; awarded for theater military service to include combat operations, during the period December 7, 1941, through November 8, 1945.

(b) The Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; awarded for theater military service to include combat operations, during the period December 7, 1941, through March 2, 1946.

(c) The American Campaign Medal; awarded for theater military service to include combat operations, during the period of December 7, 1941, through March 2, 1946.

(2) Any veteran who served in the theater of combat operations in Korea during the Korean War, and is eligible for the Korean Service Medal; awarded for theater military service to include combat operations during the period June 27, 1950, through July 27, 1954.

(3) Any veteran who served in the theater of combat operations in Vietnam during the Vietnam era (February 28, 1961, through May 7, 1975) and who received the Southeast Asian Campaign Medal for such service.

(4) Any veteran who served in the Lebanon theater of operations (August 25, 1982, through February 26, 1984) and who received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

(5) Any veteran who served in the Grenada theater of operations (October 23, 1983, through November 21, 1983) and who received an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

(6) Any veteran who served in the Panama theater of operations (December 20, 1989, through January 31, 1990) and who received an Armed forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

(7) Any veteran who served in the theater of combat operations in the Gulf War (August 2, 1990, and ending by Presidential proclamation or law) and who received a Southwest Asian Campaign Medal for such service.

(8) Any veteran who served in the Somalia theater of operations (September 17, 1992, and ending by Presidential proclamation or law) and who received an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

b. Veterans who served in the peace-keeping operations in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, including Bosnia and Kosovo, are also eligible for VA readjustment counseling at Vet Centers. Services for combat veterans under this policy are authorized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the VA Memorandum "Eligibility for Veteran Returnees from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia," dated April 26, 2000, from the Deputy Under Secretary for Health, to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Such veterans were awarded an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for one or more of the following three operations: Operation Joint Endeavor; Operation Point Guard, or Operation Joint Forge.

c. Requests for medical services under this policy that do not meet these eligibility requirements may still qualify for such services if the veteran's DD-214, Discharge Papers,

shows an award of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in some other conflict or period of armed hostility not included in the preceding list. Active duty, Reservists, and National Guard who were activated to a combat mission and then are subsequently separated from active duty receive DD Form 214, which may indicate such an award.

d. National Guard and Reserve personnel who were activated and served in a theater of combat or in combat against a hostile force may also be eligible. National Guard and Reserve personnel are eligible for VA health care, if they were ordered to active duty by a Federal declaration, served the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty, and released or discharged from active duty under other than dishonorable conditions. To be eligible, National Guard or Reserve personnel must have served 24 months of continuous active duty or the full period for which called or ordered to active duty, whichever is shorter.

e. No special treatment authority applies to care provided through the WRIISCs. Care is to be provided to enrolled combat veterans under VA's general treatment authority. This means that only those combat veterans who are enrolled in priority category 7 (i.e., those with discretionary eligibility for VA health care) are subject to co-payment requirements for care furnished by the centers.

4. Follow-Up Responsibility. Questions regarding this information letter may be addressed to the Environmental Agents Service (131) at (202) 273-8579.

S/ Ann Patterson for
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Under Secretary for Health

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