

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT OFFICE

Annual Assessment of Committee Activities
January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017

Committee Name: Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

Calendar Year 2017 Committee Goals: The Committee fully met its goals in 2017. It held three meetings in open public session that featured experts in a broad range of fields, which helped inform the Committee's recommendations and created a forum that fostered discussion among the Committee, VA representatives, Veterans and other stakeholders. Additionally, each meeting was held in a different city and spanned the continental U.S. to allow for greater participation from experts and Veterans across the country. The Committee approved and sent a focused set of actionable recommendations that identify outstanding opportunities the VA can take to greatly advance Gulf War-related research and could hasten the development of therapies that benefit Gulf War Veterans.

MyVA Breakthrough Priorities: The activities of the Committee in 2017 aligned with several of the Secretary's priorities. The Committee provided advice and made recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on proposed research studies, plans, and strategies related to understanding and treating the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Gulf War. All of these activities were aimed at identifying research that will improve the health of Veterans and provide greater access to health care, and thereby support Greater Choice. The Committee also worked closely with VA on developing an approach to establishing a coordinated system of centers that would move VA closer to a learning health-research system. This system will better integrate research with clinical care and promote continuous learning throughout the VA, which will lead to more informed and consistent care for many Veterans, thus supporting the effort to Modernize Systems, particularly the health care system. Collectively, the above also contributes to the Secretary's priority to improve Efficiency at VA.

Committee Activities: Committee activities for the year fully supported the Committee accomplishing its mission in 2017. The Committee proceedings helped identify and facilitate a tremendous opportunity for the VA to partner with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on a deep phenotyping study of Gulf War illness and chronic fatigue syndrome. The study offers high potential to meaningfully advance our understanding of these health conditions and the CRADO now considers the study a high priority for Gulf War-related research. Throughout the year, there was also consideration for how the VA could act on one of the Committee's recommendations from 2016, which called for better integrating research with clinical care by developing a coordinated system of centers focused on chronic conditions of post-deployment. These two issues were the focus of the Committee's recommendations in 2017. The Committee also held three public meetings this year. During the first meeting, scientific and medical experts presented on biorepositories and brain banks, including the VA's Million Veteran Program and other research cohorts. At this meeting the NIH's deep phenotyping study was also presented and engendered the idea for the VA to partner with the NIH on the study. There was much interest and support for the VA to add Gulf War illness and control groups to the study design. At the second meeting, a range of scientific topics was covered, from sleep disorders, to aging and cognitive impairment, to brain cancer. There was also discussion of how to operationalize the deep phenotyping study collaboration with the NIH and continued discussion of the coordinated system of centers. The final meeting of 2017 began with a conversation between Committee members and the CRADO, Dr. Rachel Ramoni, on research strategies and priorities. The meeting also featured scientific presentations on the microbiome and gastrointestinal disorders. A round table discussion on the deep phenotyping study was held at the end of the meeting that brought together the VA and NIH study leads, invited speakers, and Committee members. Throughout the year, the Committee staff did a

