

Annual Report
Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses
December 1, 2004

1. Origin and Membership

The Research Advisory Committee of Gulf War Veterans Illnesses' was appointed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi on January 23, 2002, pursuant to Public Law 105-368. Committee members who have served during 2004 are listed in Appendix A. The Secretary simultaneously appointed an advisory panel of experts, whose current members are listed in Appendix B.

2. Committee Activities

The Committee held three meetings during 2004: (1) February 23-24 at VA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., (2) June 28-29 at the VA Medical Center and War-Related Injury and Illness Study Center (WRIISC) in East Orange, New Jersey, and (3) October 25-26 at VA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. All meetings were open to the public. Committee meetings featured scientific presentations by investigators whose work represents the most advanced research related to the subject of Gulf War veterans' illnesses (GWI). Major topics addressed during 2004 meetings included infectious diseases among Gulf War veterans, immunological findings related to Gulf War service, potential health consequences of depleted uranium, findings from research investigations and clinical activities at the New Jersey WRIISC Center, environmental monitoring in the Gulf War and in Operation Iraqi Freedom, potential effects of fuel exposures and oil well fires during the Gulf War, and treatment studies and activities supported by the federal government.

Research topics discussed in Committee meetings were addressed by multiple investigators in each area. Representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Defense (DOD), and other federal agencies were invited to attend the meetings and participate in discussions with presenting scientists along with Committee members. This structure has allowed Committee meetings to serve not only as a forum for the presentation of cutting-edge GWI research, but also as a vehicle for advancing that

research and disseminating current information to government scientists. Meetings also featured regular updates on VA GWI administrative and scientific research activities and on additional published scientific research related to GWI. Time was also reserved each day to allow members of the public to provide comments on the Committee's work and on matters related to GWI.

Committee members have been active participants in all aspects of the Committee's work. Meetings have been well-attended throughout the year, with all members present at each Committee meeting. In addition, members have devoted substantial time to Committee business outside of meetings, reviewing scientific literature and contributing to the preparation of a major report containing the Committee's findings and recommendations on topics considered during its initial two years of activity.

The Committee has kept VA leadership and the leadership of the Office of Research and Development (ORD) informed of its work and its findings on an ongoing basis. This has been accomplished through attendance by administrative staff from VA's central office at Committee meetings, and communications between the Committee chairman and scientific director, and the Secretary and ORD leadership.

3. Support Activities.

The Committee staff consists of three members including the scientific director, Lea Steele, Ph.D., an additional research health scientist, and a program specialist. Committee offices are located at the VA Eastern Kansas Medical Center in Topeka, Kansas. In addition to ongoing activities related to monitoring research related to GWI, preparation of Committee reports, and development of Committee meetings, the staff now has major responsibility for all Committee administrative activities and management of the Committee's website.

4. Accomplishments.

In 2004, the Committee produced a 143-page report, "Scientific Progress in Understanding Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses: Report and Recommendations," documenting the findings of its initial two years of operation. After an initial review, the report was officially released

by the Secretary at a press conference held at VA Headquarters on November 12, 2004. The report attracted considerable media attention in the month before its public release, which continued in the weeks following the press conference. After its release, bound copies of the report were provided to all members of Congress, to research directors at all VA Medical Centers, as well as to veterans, scientists, and members of the public who requested a copy. The full report is available on the Committee's website at www.va.gov/RAC-GWVI.

In addition, the Committee chairman and scientific director have worked closely with VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) leadership throughout the year to develop a more effective Gulf War illnesses research program. This effort was prompted by the Secretary following disappointing results related to studies funded under the Deployment Health Research Initiative through February, 2004. A new dedicated Gulf War veterans' illnesses Request for Applications (RFA) was issued in April, 2004 implementing some elements of the new program. This RFA attracted an increased number of proposals related to Gulf War veterans' illnesses and resulted in \$8.3 million in additional FY2004 Gulf War-related research expenditures. However, research studies funded under this announcement continued to reflect a significant proportion of stress-oriented proposals. As described in the Committee's report, accumulated research has indicated that studies of psychological stress have very limited relevance to the multisymptom illnesses affecting the large majority of ill Gulf War veterans.

In response to the Committee's report and the new research program designed at ORD, in November, 2004, the Secretary announced a major new research initiative for Gulf War veterans' illnesses for FY2005. This initiative makes available \$15 million for new Gulf War illnesses research, including an innovative treatment research center and a dedicated RFA for Gulf War illnesses research. The Gulf War Illness treatment research center will identify treatments that may hold promise for GWI and conduct pilot studies. The FY2005 RFA will specify research topics of particular promise and interest, and will exclude proposals based on the premise that stress is the central cause of Gulf War veterans'

illnesses. Gulf War illness research proposals will be reviewed by a new dedicated merit review board made up of scientists with expertise in this area.

The announcement of this initiative establishes the foundation for a logical and productive Gulf War illnesses research program that can ultimately yield discoveries that “improve the health of ill Gulf War veterans”—the standard by which research should be judged, according to the Committee charter. The success of this initiative will depend upon its effective implementation. The Committee looks forward to working with the Secretary and ORD leadership to achieve this objective.

The progress achieved to date reflects both the new research on Gulf War illnesses that has emerged in recent years and the leadership that Secretary Principi has brought to this critical subject. From the appointment of this Committee to the approval of this promising new research initiative, Secretary Principi has decisively promoted efforts to address the health consequences of service in the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The Committee deeply appreciates the personal interest of the Secretary in its work. More importantly, his actions have told ill Gulf veterans that their government remembers their sacrifices, understands the seriousness of their illnesses, and is committed to pursuing new scientific opportunities to improve their health.

Appendix A

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses Committee Members

Chairman

James H. Binns, former Chairman, Parallel Design, Inc.; former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense; Phoenix, Arizona.

Committee Members

Nicola Cherry, MD, PhD, Professor and Chair, Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Beatrice A. Golomb, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Medicine, University of California, San Diego, California.

Joel C. Graves, Captain, Armor, U.S. Army Retired (1990-1991 Gulf War Veteran), Lacey, Washington.

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

Marguerite L. Knox, MN, NP, Senior Sales Representative, Eli Lilly & Company, Hopkins, South Carolina.

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

Pierre Pellier, MD, Global TA Head Neuroscience, Novartis pharma AG, Basel, Switzerland

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

Steve Smithson, Assistant Director, Gulf War Task Force, American Legion, Washington, DC.

Lea Steele, PhD, Research Associate Professor, College of Human Ecology, Kansas State University; Scientific Director, Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, Topeka, Kansas.

Consultant to the Committee

Jack Melling, PhD, Senior Program Manager, Battelle Memorial Institute, Columbus, Ohio.

Appendix B

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses Expert Panelists

Carrolee Barlow, MD, PhD, BrainCells Inc., San Diego, California.

Floyd E. Bloom, MD, Chair, Department of Neuropharmacology, TSRI Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, California.

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

Eugene M. Johnson, Jr., MD, Professor, Department of Neurology, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.

Antonio Sastre, PhD, Principal Science Advisor, Midwest Research Institute, Kansas City, Missouri.

James J. Tuite, III, CEO, ASD Biosystems Inc., Richmond, Virginia.

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