

**Annual Report**  
**Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses**  
**December 1, 2005**

1. Origin and Membership

The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses was first appointed by former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi on January 23, 2002, pursuant to Public Law 105-368. Further appointments were made by Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson on October 26, 2005. Committee members who have served during 2005 are listed in Appendix A. Appointed members of an advisory panel of additional experts are listed in Appendix B.

2. Committee Activities

The Committee will hold three meetings during 2005: April 6-8, September 19-21, and a third meeting to be held December 12-13, all at VA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. All meetings are open to the public. The first two 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 at 2005 meetings included treatments and pathophysiology of other chronic multisymptom illnesses including chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and multiple chemical sensitivity; potential health consequences of depleted uranium; research related to vaccines and Gulf War illnesses; research related to oil fires, jet fuel, and other exposures; cancer patterns and mortality.

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.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable R. James Nicholson, addressed the Committee at its September meeting and invited comments from Committee members. The December meeting will be devoted to discussions of the content of the Committee's next report, covering material reviewed at meetings during 2004 and 2005.

Committee members have been active participants in all aspects of the Committee's work. Meetings have been well-attended throughout the year. In addition, members have devoted substantial time to Committee business outside of meetings.

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 has primary responsibility for all Committee administrative activities and management of the Committee's website.

4. Designated Federal Officer

A new Designated Federal Officer for the Committee was named during the year, William Goldberg, Ph.D. Dr. Goldberg was also named portfolio manager for the Gulf War illnesses research portfolio within the VA Office of Research and Development. The Committee welcomed the appointment of a portfolio manager for Gulf War illnesses research, and Dr.

Goldberg has provided professional participation by VA ORD in Committee meetings and a regular point of contact at other times, which had not previously been the case.

5. Accomplishments

In addition to the Committee business mentioned above, the Committee chairman, scientific director, and other members have worked closely with VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) leadership during the year regarding the implementation of the FY2005 Gulf War Illnesses research program announced by former Secretary Anthony J. Principi in November, 2004. With substantial input from the Committee, a dedicated Gulf War veterans' illnesses Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in April, 2005. This RFP attracted 44 proposals related to Gulf War veterans' illnesses. The proposals were reviewed by a new merit review panel dedicated to Gulf War illnesses and resulted in 12 new projects funded for \$5.2 million over three years, including \$1.7 million in FY2006. Although initiated as part of Secretary Principi's commitment to 2005 research, this research was not approved or funded until FY2006.

Committee representatives also spent considerable time providing input to ORD in its development of an RFP for the Gulf War Illnesses Treatment Research Center component of the FY2005 research plan. Although the substance of the Center had been agreed on prior to the November, 2004, announcement, the RFP was not completed until after the end of FY2005 and is expected to be issued early in FY2006.

In summary, the Committee welcomes the new leadership at ORD provided by Dr. Joel Kupersmith and his staff in the latter part of the year and their intentions to build an effective Gulf War illnesses research program. However, the measurable results for the year failed to seriously address former Secretary Principi's commitment to fund up to \$15 million in new research in FY2005. Out of the \$9.1 million total funding categorized by ORD as allocated for Gulf War illnesses research in FY2005, only \$96,000 represented funding for new projects initiated in FY2005 and dedicated to GWI research. Of the balance, \$5.3 million went for projects funded prior to FY2005, \$2.1 million for projects funded in response to the FY2004 RFA, \$1.3 million for ALS research not specific to the

Gulf War and projects with no clear relevance to the health of Gulf War veterans, and \$0.3 million for an ongoing imaging program initiated in prior years.

In a letter to Secretary Nicholson dated September 30, the Research Advisory Committee also expressed concern that the VA Environmental Agents Service has launched several misguided studies by the Institute of Medicine (IOM). These studies were not reviewed by the Research Advisory Committee, as required by statute, when proposed. By restricting the questions asked and/or the research to be considered, these studies invite results that imply Gulf War illnesses are no different from the expected health consequences of any war. These studies continue a pattern of VA and IOM staff misusing the IOM to subvert the will of Congress and mislead the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. For example, the IOM studies will not include toxicology findings from animal research in determining the strength of evidence linking Gulf War exposures to the health of Gulf War veterans, although they are specifically required to do so by law.

Many VA field researchers continue to produce excellent work. One such study describes the magnitude of the problem facing VA and the Committee. Results from VA's ongoing Longitudinal Health Study of Gulf War Era Veterans show that fully twenty-five percent of Gulf veterans have chronic multisymptom illness over and above the background rate found in their non-deployed counterparts, with fewer than three percent recovering from those conditions since the war.

These figures are a reminder of the goal against which VA and other federal research should be judged according to the Committee charter: "to improve the health of ill Gulf War veterans." The success of research efforts cannot be measured in terms of dollars spent or projects funded – only in terms of improvements in veterans' health.

Regrettably, after four years of operation, neither the Committee nor VA can report progress toward this goal. Research has not produced effective treatments for these conditions nor shown that existing treatments are significantly effective.

As summarized in the Committee's 2004 Report, however, research has begun to define the nature of the problem. The addition to the Committee of new scientists with neuroscience and other relevant backgrounds will enable future Committee recommendations to more precisely address underlying mechanisms and potentially lead to the development of new treatments. The GWI Treatment Research Center concept continues to offer the potential for identifying existing treatments that are beneficial, whether currently in use for these illnesses or not.

While the science is difficult, the scientific community is making dramatic strides in understanding and addressing complex illnesses, including those resulting from toxic insults and damage to the nervous system. The goal of making a difference to the health of ill Gulf War veterans should be a reasonable and inspiring objective.

The greater challenge is whether the commitment exists to remove the political constraints that have misguided and delayed the accomplishment of this goal for the past fourteen years.

## Appendix A

### Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

#### 2005 Committee Members

##### Chairman

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

##### Committee Members

Carrolee Barlow, MD, PhD, Vice President Biology Research, BrainCells, Inc., San Diego, California.\*

Floyd E. Bloom, MD, Chief Executive Officer, Neurome, Inc.; Professor Emeritus, TSRI Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, California.\*

Daniel J Clauw, MD, Assistant Dean, Clinical and Translation Research and Professor of Medicine, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.\*

Beatrice A. Golomb, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Medicine, University of California, La Jolla, 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, Tissue Bank Manager, South Carolina Cancer Center, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

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

Mary J Nettleman, MD, MS, Chair, Department of Medicine, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.\*

James P. O'Callaghan, PhD, Head of Molecular Neurotoxicology Laboratory, Toxicology and Molecular Biology Branch of the Health Effects Laboratory Division, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NIOSH, Morgantown, WV.\*

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, Deputy Director, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, 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.

Hugh H. Tilson, MD, DrPH, Clinical Professor, Public Health Leadership Program, University of North Carolina School of Public Health, Chapel Hill, NC.\*

Consultant to the Committee

Jack Melling, PhD, Consultant to United States Government Accountability Office. Vienna, Austria.

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\* Appointed to the Committee October 26, 2005

\*\* Rotated off the Committee in May 2005

## **Appendix B**

### **Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses**

#### **2005 Expert Panelists**

Carrolee Barlow, MD, PhD, Vice President Biology Research, BrainCells, Inc., San Diego, California.\*

Floyd E. Bloom, MD, Chief Executive Officer, Neurome, Inc.; Professor Emeritus, 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.

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\*Appointed to serve as a Committee member October 26, 2005