



Office of Public Health

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Chief Officer

Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Research Advisory Committee Meeting
June 18-19, 2012



“Patients are in control of their health care, and the system is designed around the needs of the patient.”

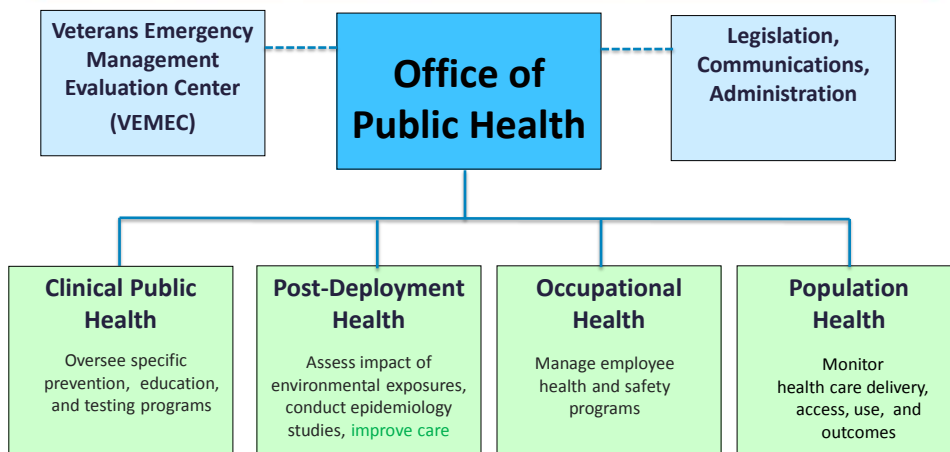
Robert A. Petzel, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health
Department of Veterans Affairs

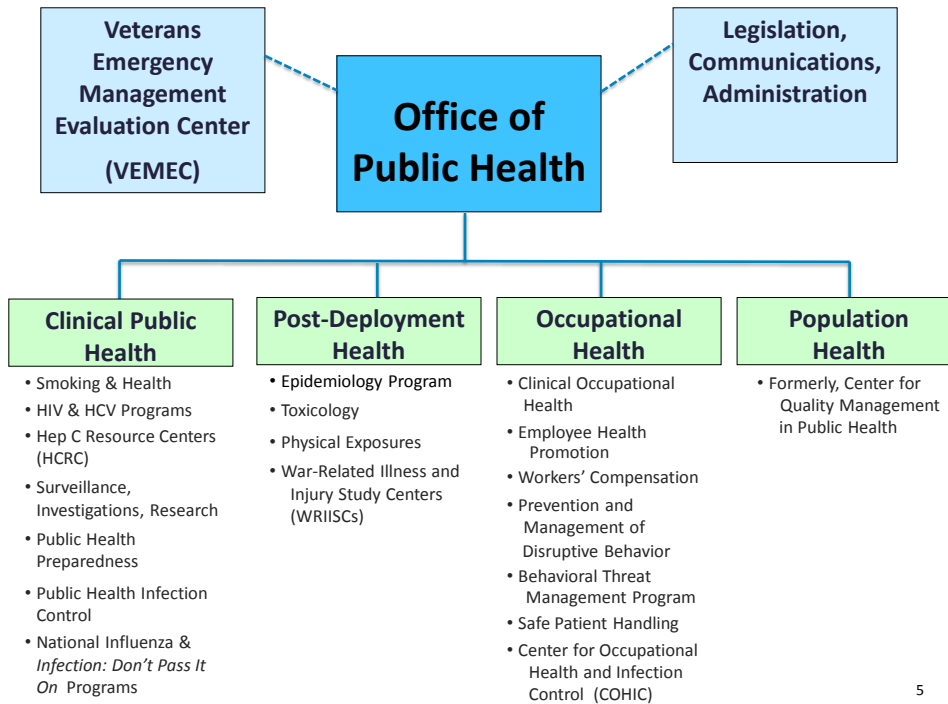
Functions of Population/Public Health

- Broad look at health of Veterans as whole (by cohort such as era)
- Conduct surveillance
 - Post-deployment health
 - Emerging health issues
 - Diseases
- Assess and report
 - Health status of Veterans overall
 - Impact of VHA interventions to improve health, decrease disparities
- Use data to make decisions
 - Risk determinations
 - Screening/diagnosis standards
 - Treatment standards
 - Policy
 - Provider/Veteran education & outreach



Organizational Structure





Clinical Public Health Focus

- National programs for HIV and hepatitis C
- Smoking and health policy and education
 - Counseling
 - Evidenced-based care for tobacco cessation
 - Integrating tobacco cessation into PTSD care
- Biosurveillance
 - e.g., seasonal influenza, H1N1, Dengue, Gulf Coast oil spill
 - Emerging diseases & other significant pathogens
- Epidemiologic investigations and look backs
 - Prostate biopsy, endoscopes, dental, surgical, provider behavior



Post-Deployment Health Focus

- Conduct surveillance and studies on environmental and occupational exposures of Veterans during military service
 - Research is one tool used by OPH
- Evaluate existing and new research to provide policy recommendations
- Oversee War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers
- Maintain Environmental Health Registries (e.g., Gulf War)
 - Inform and provide outreach to Veterans
 - Advise and educate clinicians

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

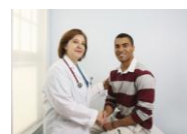


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Specific Initiatives for Gulf War Veterans

- Follow-up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans
 - Third in a series of surveys to learn how the health of 1990-91 Gulf War-era Veterans has changed over time
- War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISC)
 - Provide comprehensive clinical evaluations and exposure assessments of Veterans
 - Patient satisfaction with the most recent visit is consistently between 95% and 100%
 - Conduct research on disease causes and treatments (e.g., effects of exposures on cardiopulmonary function and the treatment of chronic pain)
 - Serve as educational resource for combat Veterans, their family members and loved ones, and Veteran health care providers
 - Provide training for clinicians
- Gulf War Registry
 - Entry into health care and enables communication and outreach

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Recent Accomplishments of Office of Public Health



Accomplishments and Ongoing Initiatives, 2009-2012 Public Health (10P3)

- Using our expertise as the largest U.S. provider of care for persons with HIV and hepatitis C
 - Through VHA initiated legislative change & program initiatives - HIV testing has doubled from 2009-2011
 - Offer and educate on latest, best treatments available for HIV, hepatitis C
- Conducting lookback and epidemiologic investigations across the VHA health system
 - Endoscopes, dental equipment, infection control breaches, surgical infections, provider behavior
- Establishing an expert group on Veteran population health
 - Assess and report on overall health status, impact of interventions through collaboration with other VHA programs
 - Using data to determine standards for screening, diagnosis, treatment

Accomplishments and Ongoing Initiatives, 2009-2012 Public Health (10P3) (continued)

- Reducing infections
 - Preventing influenza with vaccinations, hand and respiratory hygiene, staying home when sick
 - Developing a health care associated infection and influenza surveillance system (HAISS) to monitor at national, VISN and facility levels
 - Promulgating a national hand washing initiative
- Strengthening public health preparedness
 - Actively collaborating within VHA, with VA, with states, and across government
 - Establishing the Veterans Emergency Management Evaluation Center (2010; VEMEC) working with VHA's Office of Emergency Mgmt (OEM) and VA Operations, Security, & Preparedness (OSP)

Accomplishments and Ongoing Initiatives, 2009-2012 Public Health (10P3) (continued)

- Ensuring a healthy, productive workforce
 - Providing employee occupational health support and consultation
 - Developing and implementing national electronic Employee Medical Folder, the electronic Occupational Health Recording Keeping System (OHRS)
 - Improving safe patient handling through distribution of equipment and dissemination systems - reducing injuries for both staff and patients in collaboration w/ Nursing, PCS, OQSV, Safety/Engineering
 - Preventing, assessing and advising on behavioral threats, disruptive behaviors
 - Promoting employee health & wellness through lifestyle changes and healthy choices (2K Walk at 150 VA locations; also collected essential items for homeless Veterans)
 - Managing and improving tracking and outcomes for Workers Compensation
 - Ongoing projects including:
 - Project BREATHE—design and production of a new and improved N95 level respirator for health care providers
 - Respiratory Protection Effectiveness Clinical Trial (ResPECT)

Accomplishments and Ongoing Initiatives, 2009-2012 Public Health (10P3)



Walking workstations for employees



Campaign to reduce health care associated infections through handwashing



Flu prevention – promoting vaccination for Veterans & staff



New pocket card to assist providers with Veterans' concerns about military exposures



Numerous collaborations & provision of guidance on tobacco cessation – esp. for mental health & substance abuse populations



Providing information for those exposed to Agent Orange



Safe patient handling equipment in use



VA2K walk for Veterans (Baltimore)

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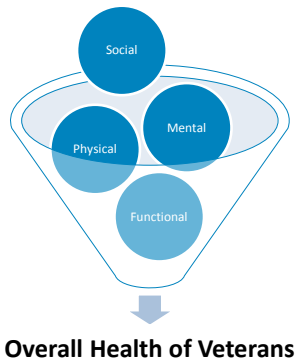
Follow-Up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans

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Survey Goal

Follow-up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans



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- Comprehensive assessment of health and wellness
- Domains: physical (such as neurologic, immunologic and respiratory), mental, women's health, functional, and social
- Focus is on multiple domains and health conditions, which will provide a population level assessment of overall health

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Survey Timeline



- Survey instrument approved by Office of Management and Budget: 2/27/2012
- Mailing of survey began: 5/21/2012
- Last mailing of survey: 12/03/2012
- Data set delivery projected: Spring 2013
- Preliminary results projected: Fall 2013

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Survey Contents

- Questions cover a multitude of manifestations of physical and mental health
- Contains 217 questions total
 - 26% physical symptoms
 - 21% mental health symptoms
 - 19% medical diagnoses
 - 12% life events
 - 8% treatment of symptoms
 - 7 % demographics
 - 6% behavioral risk factors (smoking, drinking, etc.)



Some Questions in the Survey are Related to Stress

- There are many physical and emotional responses to stress—physical (e.g., headache, muscle pain), mood (e.g., anxiety, irritability), and behavioral (e.g., angry outburst, tobacco use)*
- Stress in this survey is one factor potentially influencing a whole range of medical outcomes
- Stress is a non-specific term that refers to an array of triggers and processes
- We recognize that stress and the mind/body link is only one of the important dimensions to be examined

* American Psychological Association's "Stress in America" report, 2010

IOM Study of Treatment for Multi-Symptom Illness

IOM Committee on Treatments for Multi-Symptom Illness

- IOM final report due for public release February 2013
- IOM Committee members recognize a comprehensive approach in their study of the treatment of multi-symptom illness in the Veteran population
- IOM has held four public meetings on this study. The committee determines public meeting schedule





Study on Multiple Sclerosis



Study on Multiple Sclerosis Section 804 of Public Law 110-389

- VA “will contract with IOM to conduct a comprehensive epidemiological study for purposes of identifying any increased risk of developing multiple sclerosis...”
- VA talked with IOM about conducting a comprehensive study; IOM’s approach was to first focus on review of current literature as part of ongoing Gulf War and health review
- IOM in its Vol. 8 report (p. 124–126) indicated there was inadequate/insufficient evidence to support an association
- Evidence to date shows no increased incidence of multiple sclerosis in Gulf War Veterans and the studies are continuing
 - Neurological mortality among U.S. Veterans of the Persian Gulf War by Barth, Kang, Bullman & Wallin (*American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 2009)
 - The Gulf War era multiple sclerosis cohort by Wallin et al (*Brain*, 2012)

Study on Multiple Sclerosis Section 804 of Public Law 110-389 (continued)

- Follow-Up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans
 - Questions on diagnoses of multiple sclerosis and other diagnosed neurological diseases (ALS, brain cancer, Parkinson's)
 - Longitudinal self-reported data includes historical military environmental exposures and medical prophylaxis
- Follow-Up Study of Multiple Sclerosis Cohort
 - Case control study examining entire period with deployed and non-deployed controls
 - Goal is to quantify risk for developing multiple sclerosis among Gulf War Veterans
- Follow-Up Study of Neurological Mortality among U.S. Veterans of the Persian Gulf War
 - Data collection complete on deaths through 2008; pending physician review
 - Continued data collection is ongoing for deaths through 2010
 - Study will add OEF/OIF Veterans who have same neurological causes of death
- Seeking Input from Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

Summary

- We are organized and "...designed around the needs of the patient" through population-based health programs
 - Employ stellar multidisciplinary staff credentialed in occupational medicine, clinical public health, toxicology, and epidemiology using multiple tools and means
 - Transitioning from exposure→disease model to health outcome→potential cause model of evaluating military exposures
 - Seeking answers in collaboration with DoD, VA Office of Research and Development, and the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses
- Our Work is Relevant to all Veterans including Gulf War Veterans
 - Expertise and knowledge maintains health and safety of Veterans
 - Surveillance and research drives policy decisions about Veteran benefits



Visit us
at
www.publichealth.va.gov

The screenshot shows the 'Public Health' section of the Department of Veterans Affairs website. The main heading is 'Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses'. Below this, there is a section titled 'Research on Gulf War Veterans Health' with a sub-heading 'To find out how the health of 1990-91 Gulf War-era veterans has changed over time, VA researchers are surveying veterans for the third time since the Gulf War.' A 'Learn More' link is provided. To the right of this text is an image of a stack of books. Below the research section, there are two columns: 'Related Illnesses' and 'Benefits'. 'Related Illnesses' includes 'Medically Unexplained Illnesses (Specially called "Gulf War Syndrome")' and 'Infectious Diseases'. 'Benefits' includes 'Disability Compensation', 'Registry Exam', and 'Health Care'. At the bottom, there are two more sections: 'Exposures during Gulf War' with a link to 'Oil Well Fires' and 'Provider Resources' with a link to 'Diagnose & Treatment'. On the right side of the page, there are several utility boxes: 'Connect with Us Veterans Health' with social media icons, a 'Subscribe' box for 'Gulf War Veterans' with an email input field, and a 'Contact VA' box with contact information for the Environmental Health Coordinator's Directory, including a 'Health Care' phone number (1-877-222-8387), a 'Benefits' phone number (1-800-827-1000), and a 'TDD (hearing impaired)' phone number (1-800-829-4833).