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Agent Orange Review

Vol. 11, NO. 2

Information for Veterans Who Served in Vietnam

May 1995

Agent Orange Special Treatment Authority Extended

On November 2, 1994, President Clinton signed Public Law 103-452, the "Veterans Health Programs Extension Act of 1994," which, among other things, extends through June 30, 1995, VA's authority to provide priority treatment to Vietnam veterans for medical problems that may be related to their exposure to herbicides during the Vietnam Conflict. Health care services under this program are limited to hospital and nursing home care in VA facilities and outpatient care in VA facilities on a pre- or post-hospitalization basis or to prevent a need for hospitalization. Health care services are provided without regard to a veteran's age, service-connected status or the veteran's ability to pay for the expenses of such care. Veterans receiving outpatient care under this program are given priority ahead of nonservice-connected veterans and equal to former prisoners of war who are receiving care for nonservice-connected conditions.

This priority treatment authority was initially established in the "Veterans' Health Care, Training, and Small Business Loan Act of 1981," Public Law 97-72, enacted November 3, 1981. It was extended by the "Veterans' Administration Health-Care Amendments of 1985," Public Law 99-166, enacted December 3, 1985; the "Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1988," Division B of Public Law 100-687, enacted November 18, 1988; the "Agent Orange Act of 1991," Public Law 102-4, enacted February 6, 1991; Public Law 103-210, enacted December 20, 1993, and now Public Law 103-452, the "Veterans Health Programs Extension Act of 1994," enacted November 2, 1994.

It is anticipated that the special treatment authority will again be extended later this year.

NAS Review Ongoing

In February 1992, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) signed an agreement with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to review and summarize the strength of the scientific evidence concerning the association between herbicide exposure during Vietnam service and a wide range of diseases and conditions suspected to be associated with such exposure. The IOM was also asked to make recommendations concerning the need, if any, for additional scientific studies to resolve areas of continuing scientific uncertainty and to comment on four particular programs mandated by Public Law 102-4.

To carry out this project, the IOM established the "Committee to Review the Health Effects in Vietnam Veterans of Exposure to Herbicides." The committee operated independently of VA and other government entities. In July 1993, the committee conclusions were announced. The findings and VA response were described in detail in issues of the "Agent Orange Review" published in 1993 and 1994.

A reconstituted IOM committee has undertaken the first update of the report. The IOM has renewed some of the original committee members and has added several individuals who are knowledgeable in the relevant disciplines, but who have not taken strong public positions on the health effects of Agent Orange or other herbicides, or on dioxin.

Literature Search

The IOM is continuing to update its bibliographic data base and its scientific literature collection, which now includes over 2,000 scientific articles published on the possible health effects of herbicides used in Vietnam. Prior to the committee's initial report, the IOM retrieved over 6,400 relevant citations through extensive online searches of biomedical, toxicologic, chemical, and regulatory bibliographic data bases. The committee will review new scientific studies published since the writing of the first report (January 1993 to April 1995). This review could lead to revisions in the findings of the 1993 report with respect to the conclusions on health effects.

Additional online searches have been undertaken to identify new studies that the committee will need to review during the follow-up effort. IOM staff have reviewed and examined reference lists of relevant newly published review articles, books, reports, and scientific conference proceedings, including two dioxin-related reports from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Committee Meetings

During the first follow-up effort, the Committee plans to meet three times and convene a workshop in conjunction with a committee meeting, possibly to explore the role of serum dioxin measurements and the development of new biomarkers for exposure to herbicides for use in future research efforts.

At the first meeting, held April 21, 1995, there was a session open to the public to solicit additional scientific information on the health effects of exposure to dioxin and other chemical compounds in herbicides used in Vietnam. The next meeting is planned for July.

The IOM will not make recommendations regarding individual's cases. While the IOM report will provide



scientific information for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to consider in making determinations about service connection, these decisions remain the responsibility of the Secretary.

Diseases and adverse effects to be considered by the committee included: (1) cancers of the stomach, colon, hepatobiliary tract, respiratory tract, testis, prostate, kidney, and brain, Hodgkin's disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, soft tissue sarcoma, nasopharyngeal cancer, and other cancers; (2) metabolic disorders including altered lipid metabolism, porphyria cutanea tarda, and diabetes; (3) autoimmune and other immunological disorders; (4) neurologic and neurobehavioral disorders, including peripheral neuropathy; (5) disorders of the digestive system including gastrointestinal ulcers and hepatotoxic effects; (6) reproductive disorders

About the Review...

The "Agent Orange Review" is prepared by VA's Environmental Agents Service (EAS). The "Review" is published periodically to provide information on Agent Orange and related matters to Vietnam veterans, their families, and others with concerns about herbicides used in Vietnam. The initial newsletter was released in November 1982. This is the twenty-fourth issue.

The "Review" is prepared approximately one to two months prior to the publication date. This issue was written in April 1995 and does not include developments that occurred since that time.

Comments or questions about the content of the "Review" are encouraged. Suggestions and ideas for future issues of the newsletter should be sent to Donald J. Rosenblum, Writer/Editor, Agent Orange Review, Environmental Agents Service (103A), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of this issue, should also be directed to Mr. Rosenblum. Please specify the number of copies requested. A limited supply of the last twelve issues (October 1989, May 1990, August 1990, February 1991, April 1991, August 1991, December 1991, April 1992, September 1992, February 1993, September 1993, and October 1994) is also available. VA facilities should order additional copies from the VA Forms Depot. VA updates the "Review" mailing address listing annually based on IRS records. "Review" recipients who have not been filing Federal income tax returns annually and have moved to another residence are encouraged to send their old and new addresses and Social Security number to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Automation Center (200/397), 1615 Woodward Street, Austin, Texas 78772-0001.

Questions about the Agent Orange Registry examination program should be directed to the Registry Physician or Agent Orange Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center. Questions regarding VA benefit programs, including disability compensation, should be referred to a veterans benefits counselor at the nearest VA facility. The telephone numbers can be found in the telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings.

including birth defects, miscarriages, and abnormal sperm morphology; (7) chloracne and other skin disorders; (8) circulatory disorders; (9) respiratory disorders; and (10) other health conditions.

Specific Review Subjects

VA has asked the committee to review three specific areas in its follow-up report, expected in late December 1995. The committee plans to (1) consider the relationship between exposure to herbicides and the subsequent development of the acute and subacute effects of peripheral neuropathy (as compared to the chronic effects focused on in the initial report); (2) carefully consider the relationship between exposure to herbicides and the subsequent development of prostate, hepatobiliary, and nasopharyngeal cancer; and (3) further address the issue of latency and how it relates to cancer development.

New Director

IOM appointed Kelley A. Brix, M.D., M.P.H., to direct this project, beginning on November 5, 1994. Since 1986, she served as the public health physician for the New York State Department of Health's Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Epidemiology.

Interagency Task Force Issues Final Report

The Agent Orange Task Force (AOTF) which had monitored and coordinated Executive Branch Agent Orange-related activities since 1979 issued its final status report last year.

The report describes the status of Agent Orange and "dioxin" related research activities. According to the report over \$127 million has been spent on completed projects, an additional \$86 million has been spent on ongoing efforts, and \$70 million is projected to be necessary over the next ten years to complete the ongoing projects.

The AOTF report indicated that 189 projects have been completed and 38 are ongoing. Of the ongoing efforts, eight deal directly with Agent Orange issues and the rest are "dioxin" related research projects. However, these eight Agent Orange projects expend about 69 percent of the current funding for the ongoing projects. Furthermore, these Agent Orange projects are projected to utilize over 95 percent of the additional funding required to complete these ongoing projects.

Task Force History

In the late 1970's a large number of Vietnam veterans expressed the belief that they had an unusually high frequency of certain illnesses. Much of their concern focused on exposure to Agent Orange and to dioxin, a contaminant in Agent Orange.

Recognizing the lack of objective health information about Vietnam veterans, on December 11, 1979, President Carter established the Interagency Work Group to Study the Possible Long-Term Health Effects of Phenoxy Herbicides and Contaminants (IWG). The group's mission was to bring

together knowledgeable government scientists to identify what was known about the health consequences of exposure to phenoxy herbicides and dioxins, to determine areas that required scientific study, and to report the results as soon as available to Congress and the public. The IWG reported to the Secretary of the (then) Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and to the White House Domestic Council.

During this period, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) began a major study of birth defects among the children of Vietnam veterans. This study was funded by VA, the Department of Defense (DOD), and CDC. The study was completed in 1984. Also during this time, DoD began its Air Force Health Study, to evaluate any adverse health effects of participation in the Ranch Hand spraying operations. Researchers are assessing mortality and morbidity among the Ranch Handers over a twenty year period. A number of reports have been issued to date. This project will continue into the 21st century.

In a July 17, 1981, meeting with veterans' leaders, President Reagan indicated that his Administration shared the concerns of Vietnam veterans about the possible health effects of Agent Orange. On August 21, 1981, President Reagan established the Agent Orange Working Group (AOWG) as part of the Cabinet Council on Human Resources, elevating and enlarging the scope of the earlier group.

The AOWG and its Science Panel oversaw and monitored numerous efforts, including completion of the Vietnam experience study, the selected cancers study, and Agent Orange validation study.

On March 29, 1990, during the Bush Administration, the AOTF was established under the Domestic Policy Council (DPC) Working Group on Health Policy to replace the AOWG. The AOTF ensured coordination and consultation between agencies in the design, conduct, monitoring, and evaluation of Agent Orange exposure studies. Through interagency review of Agent Orange studies, the AOTF forwarded for the DPC Health Policy Working Group consideration any policy concerns that required interagency resolution or decision.

The Department of Health and Human Services (or its predecessor) served as the lead department throughout the life of the interagency groups.

Q's and A's

The Q's and A's (Questions and Answers) feature of the "Review" responds to questions that have been received from various sources. Questions for future issues should be sent to Donald J. Rosenblum, Writer/Editor, Environmental Agents Service (103A), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. We cannot guarantee that all questions received will be used in this column,

During the past several years Secretary Brown has recognized four additional conditions as service-connected based on exposure to an herbicides that contains dioxin. Will more illnesses be recognized in the near future?

Possibly. The answer to this question depends on the findings of ongoing scientific research and objective reviews of these studies in the context of earlier findings. As noted

elsewhere in this issue of the "Agent Orange Review," the National Academy of Sciences' (NAS) Institute of Medicine is continuing its review. The NAS 1993 report was the basis for Secretary Brown's earlier determinations.

There have been a number of rumors that VA will soon terminate the Agent Orange Registry examination program. Is there any truth to these rumors?

No. Over 240,000 Vietnam veterans have received this examination offered by VA medical centers nationwide. There are no plans to discontinue this program. Periodically, we have heard rumors of this nature. We do not know where such misinformation originated. If readers will direct us to the source(s) of these inaccurate reports, we will be happy to provide factual information for future disseminations. The circulation of erroneous information can be confusing and harmful to veterans.

Agent Orange Fact Sheet Series Updated

The Environmental Agents Service in VA headquarters in Washington, DC, has updated and released a series of Agent Orange fact sheets, known as "Agent Orange Briefs."

The revised "Briefs," dated September 1994, describe a wide range of Agent Orange-related matters. The following "Briefs" are currently available: (A1) **Agent Orange - General Information**, (A2) **Agent Orange Class Action Lawsuit**, (B 1) **Agent Orange Registry**, (B2) **Agent Orange - Priority Treatment Program**, (B3) **Agent Orange and VA Disability Compensation**, (B4) **VA Information Resources on Agent Orange and Related Matters**, (C1) **Agent Orange - The Problem Encountered in Research**, (C2) **Agent Orange and Vietnam Related Research - VA Efforts**, (C3) **Agent Orange and Vietnam Related Research - Non-VA Efforts**, (D1) **Agent Orange and Birth Defects**, (D2) **Agent Orange and Chloracne**, (D3) **Agent Orange and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphomas**, (D4) **Agent Orange and Soft Tissue Sarcomas**, (D5) **Agent Orange and Peripheral Neuropathy**, (D6) **Agent Orange and Hodgkin's Disease**, (D7) **Agent Orange and Porphyria Cutanea Tarda**, (D8) **Agent Orange and Multiple Myeloma**, and (D9) **Agent Orange and Respiratory Cancers**.

Changes in law, research developments, compensation policy modifications, and the report of the National Academy of Sciences necessitated numerous changes in the fact sheet series. Nearly all the "Briefs" were revised and several new fact sheets (D6-D9) were added.

The "Briefs" were distributed throughout the VA system and to various State offices. Earlier versions of the "Briefs" were released in October 1988, October 1989, September 1990, July 1991, February 1992, and January 1993. Copies of the outdated issues are no longer available.

For additional information or a copy of the new fact sheets, contact the Agent Orange Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center or write to the Environmental Agents Service (103A), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

VA Publishes Literature Review Update and Synopsis

VA recently published Volumes XXIII and XXIV of the *Review of Literature on Herbicides, Including Phenoxy Herbicides and Associated Dioxins*. The report consists of an analysis and annotated bibliography of literature produced worldwide regarding Agent Orange and other herbicides. The comprehensive technical document is prepared primarily for researchers, physicians, scientists, and others with similar backgrounds.

The initial two volumes of the literature review, mandated by Public Law 96-151, were released in 1981. The latest issues describe herbicide literature that became available in 1993. Since the National Academy of Sciences is reviewing and analyzing all available literature of this subject, Volumes XXIII and XXIV will be the last in this series.

Copies of all volumes are maintained at VA medical center libraries. The report has also been distributed to researchers throughout the world. The reviews have been prepared by independent contractors.

To assist non-technical readers in understanding the complex scientific issues involving Agent Orange and other herbicides, VA also publishes a series of "lay language" summaries, entitled *Synopsis of Scientific Literature on Phenoxy Herbicides and Associated Dioxins*.

Number 11 in the synopsis series corresponds with Volume XXIII and XXIV of the literature review. The summaries, published as booklets, were prepared by the same contractors who produced the literature review. Copies of the synopses have been sent to all VA medical center libraries. A limited supply of the latest issues of the literature review and synopsis is available from the Environmental Agents Service.

Conditions Recognized as Service-Connected for Vietnam Veterans Based on Exposure to Agent Orange or Other Herbicides That Contained Dioxin

1. Chloracne
2. Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
3. Soft tissue sarcoma
4. Hodgkin's disease
5. Porphyria cutanea tarda
6. Multiple myeloma
7. Respiratory cancers (including cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus)

Conditions Not Recognized as Service-Connected for Vietnam Veterans Based on Exposure to Agent Orange or Other Herbicides That Contained Dioxin

Presumption of service connection based on exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam is **not** warranted for the following conditions: prostate cancer, peripheral neuropathy, hepatobiliary cancers, bone cancers, female reproductive cancers, renal cancers, testicular cancer, leukemia, abnormal sperm parameters and infertility, cognitive and neuropsychiatric disorders, motor/coordination dysfunction, metabolic and digestive disorders, immune system disorders, circulatory disorders, respiratory disorders (other than lung cancer), nasal/nasopharyngeal cancer, skin cancer, gastrointestinal tumors, bladder cancer, brain tumors, and any other condition for which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has not specifically determined a presumption of service connection is warranted.

Agent Orange Review



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