



Department of
Veterans Affairs

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 273-6000
www.va.gov

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 21, 2010

VA Approves \$2.8M for Gulf War Illness Research

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has approved \$2.8 million to fund three new research projects that focus on testing or developing new treatments for illnesses affecting Veterans who served in the Gulf War 1990-1991. The research incorporates recommendations of the department’s Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses Task Force.

“Reaching out to Gulf War Veterans is essential to the transformation of VA,” said Veterans Affairs Chief of Staff John R. Gingrich. “This research is a great opportunity to do something that will improve the care and services these Veterans have earned.”

About 697,000 men and women served in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm from August 1990 to June 1991 during the Gulf War. In the years since they returned, nearly a quarter of these Veterans have experienced chronic symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, gastrointestinal problems, cognitive dysfunction, sleep disturbances, persistent headaches, skin rashes, respiratory conditions and mood changes. The symptoms are known collectively as “Gulf War Veterans’ illnesses.”

A recent report by the Institute of Medicine’s Committee on Gulf War and Health, “Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War,” noted that chronic multi-symptom illnesses affect an estimated 250,000 Gulf War Veterans. Given the findings, VA is embarking on a national Gulf War Veterans’ illness research program to identify and adopt the most effective treatments for Veterans.

- More -

VA Gulf War Research 2/2/2

“Last February, we welcomed Secretary Shinseki’s decision to take a serious look at the disability claims of Gulf War Veterans,” said Clarence Hill, national commander of The American Legion. “Now that VA is following through with these important studies of Gulf War illness, which has plagued many of the 700,000 Gulf War Veterans for nearly 20 years, The American Legion believes these studies should provide a shared foundation for those Veterans who need to be cared for and compensated for their disabilities.”

The first \$700,000 will be available Oct. 1, 2010, the beginning of fiscal year 2011.

The studies are expected to take between two to five years to complete, and include:

-- A five-year study to evaluate the impact of resistance exercise training (RET) in treating chronic musculoskeletal pain and associated symptoms in Gulf War Veterans. The study will evaluate the influence of RET on total physical activity, pain sensitivity and regulation, and brain white-matter tracts. Dane B. Cook, Ph.D., of VA’s William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital, Madison, Wis., will conduct it.

-- A four-year study on an animal model of Gulf War illnesses to assess the effectiveness of therapies to enhance mood and memory. The therapies are designed to increase generation of nerve cells in the hippocampus, improving cognitive function and reversing depressive and anxiety-like behaviors. One strategy will test treatment with antidepressant medicine and a drug or dietary supplement having antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. The second strategy will test use of either an antidepressant or an antioxidant/anti-inflammatory agent, combined with exercise. Ashok K. Shetty, Ph.D., of the Durham, N.C., VA Medical Center, will conduct it.

-- A two-year pilot study that will include randomized, controlled, eight-week trials of an intervention known as “mindfulness-based stress reduction,” compared with usual care. Assessments of Veterans will include symptom-based measures of pain, fatigue, and cognitive and physical function as well as objective measures of attention, concentration and memory. David J. Kearney, M.D., of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System, Seattle, Wash., will conduct it.

The IOM report noted that the illnesses seen in Gulf War Veterans cannot be ascribed to any psychiatric disorder and likely result from genetic and environmental factors, although the data are not strong enough to draw conclusions about specific causes.

#