



# Gulf War Review

## Annual Report to Congress on Gulf War Research Describes Progress and Priorities

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released the eighth comprehensive report to Congress on the results, status, and priorities of Federally funded research on the health consequences of military service in the Gulf War. VA is required by law (Public Law 102-585) to submit this report every year. The research takes place at both Federal and university research facilities.

The 155-page document, entitled *Annual Report to Congress – Federally Sponsored Research on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses for 2001*, describes the Gulf War veterans’ illnesses research portfolio in great detail. As of December 31, 2001, a total of 224 Federal projects have been sponsored by the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Health and Human Services, and many of these projects are still in progress.

The report was prepared by the Research Working Group of the Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board (MVHCB). While this annual report was being written in March 2002, the MVHCB was discontinued. However, interagency coordination is continuing.

### \$212.6 Million for Gulf War-Related Research

The scope of the Federal research portfolio is very broad, ranging from small pilot studies to large-scale epidemiology studies involving large populations of veterans and major research centers. The recent report noted that the Federal Departments are projecting cumulative expenditures of \$212.6 million for research from Fiscal Year 1994 through Fiscal Year 2002. As of September 30, 2001, 124 projects were completed and 100 projects were ongoing.

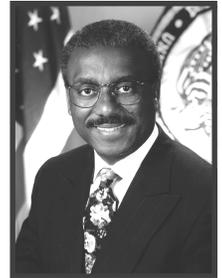
The overall emphasis has been greatest on symptoms and general health status and brain and nervous system function. Nine large studies published in 2001 focused on symptoms and general health, and six focused on brain and nervous system function, including post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, and neuropsychological functioning. *(Continued on page 2)*

## Jesse Brown, a “Veteran’s Veteran,” Dies at 58; Former VA Secretary Expanded Benefits for Gulf War Veterans with Undiagnosed Illnesses

On August 15, 2002, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs died after a long illness.

“Jesse Brown was the veteran’s veteran – a man of unceasing commitment and advocacy for all who have served their country, especially those who were disabled in service,” declared Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi.

*(Continued on page 2)*



*Jesse Brown*

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**(Annual Report** *Continued from the previous page)*

Like earlier annual reports, the 2001 annual report is divided into six sections: Section I is an introduction. Section II highlights and summarizes research progress since the previous Annual Report. Section III consists of an analysis of the Federal list of projects on Gulf War veterans' illnesses. Section IV describes significant new research projects. Section V covers the management of Federal Gulf War veterans' illnesses research programs, including oversight, peer review, and coordination. Section VI discusses priorities established in past years for future research, and highlights the progress made to date.

The document includes two appendices. The first provides information regarding the various research projects by 1) sponsoring department, 2) focus area, and 3) funding. The second is the program from the Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board's Second Plenary Conference that was held in December 2001.

The report is on the web at: [www.va.gov/resdev/prt/gulfwar2001/](http://www.va.gov/resdev/prt/gulfwar2001/). (Note: The address includes underscored characters between "gulf", "war" and "2001".) Questions about the report or requests for hard copies can be directed to the VA Office of Research and Development (12), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

## **Gulf War Medical Research Library on Internet**

Welcome to Medsearch! In June 2002, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Defense (DoD), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that they have joined together to establish a centralized reference library of government-sponsored Gulf War-related medical research on the internet. At HHS, both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health are involved in the initiative.

The library can be accessed at [www.GulfLINK.osd.mil/medsearch](http://www.GulfLINK.osd.mil/medsearch) and at VA's Gulf War site: [www.va.gov/gulfwar](http://www.va.gov/gulfwar). It was created to help service members, Gulf War veterans and their families, and other interested individuals to learn more about the research initiatives regarding the health problems and concerns of Gulf War veterans. This web site also should assist researchers and other scientists interested in this subject.

In July 2001, DoD, VA, and HHS agreed to combine their resources to establish this one-stop source of

research information. The developers worked with veterans and researchers to make sure that it is user-friendly. The web site was set up to serve the needs of both technical and non-technical readers. It is indexed in plain language headings so that people can easily find the information they are looking for. The topic headings include subjects of particular interest to Gulf War veterans that may not be featured in other sources. Researchers who need specific data should be able to find it on Medsearch.

The site will be updated frequently with the most recent and complete information available.

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**(Jesse Brown** *Continued from the previous page)*

"He leaves behind many friends at VA and throughout the veterans community. We are saddened not only by this personal loss but also by the stilling of his staunch voice and good counsel," adds Secretary Principi.

Brown served as Secretary of Veterans Affairs from January 1993 until July 1997. Under his leadership, VA decentralized its health care structure, began to offer more outpatient, primary care services, and expanded benefits for former Prisoners of War and for veterans who suffered from Agent Orange and Gulf War-related illnesses. He is also credited with increasing VA services to homeless veterans and expanding programs for women veterans and veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Before coming to VA, he spent a career with the Disabled American Veterans, serving as executive director of its Washington, DC office from 1989 to 1993. He was injured by enemy fire while serving as a Marine in Vietnam.

## **Understood Problems of Gulf War Veterans and Took Action on Their Behalf**

As Secretary, Brown recognized that some Gulf War veterans were being unfairly denied benefits for illnesses related to their service in the Gulf because their VA physicians were unable to diagnose their illnesses. Secretary Brown was committed to rectifying this inequity. He testified before Congress and sent letters to all 535 members of Congress urging prompt action on legislation that would authorize VA to provide compensation to these unfortunate veterans. Congress took prompt action on this matter.

Secretary Brown also established special referral centers for Gulf War veterans with illnesses that defied diagnosis at their local VA facility, created a “Blue Ribbon” panel and advisory committee on Gulf War veterans illnesses, opened a national toll-free helpline for Gulf War veterans, and took numerous other steps on behalf of Gulf War veterans.

## Corrections

(1) In our March 2002 issue, we stated on page 3 that “On December 27, 2001, the President signed a law (passed by Congress) further extending the manifestation period (time during which symptoms appear) to September 30, 2011.”

In fact, this law did not extend the manifestation period. It actually extended the period in which VA may determine that a presumption of service connection should be established for a disability occurring in Gulf War veterans.

Steve Smithson of the American Legion brought this error to our attention and Bill Russo of the Compensation and Pension Service in VA Central Office provided the corrected language. We sincerely appreciate the contributions of both of them, and we regret any problems or inconvenience that this may have caused.

(2) In the June 2002 issue, we misstated the web site for the Annual Report to Congress – Federal Sponsored Research on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses for 2000. The correct site is [www.va.gov/resdev/prt/gulf\\_war\\_2000/](http://www.va.gov/resdev/prt/gulf_war_2000/). The address includes underscored characters between “gulf,” “war”, and “2000.”

This error was brought to our attention by Michael H. Short, Web Developer VA Medical Center, Boston. Thank you, Michael. We apologize to our readers for any problems or inconvenience that this may have caused.

## Second IOM Report “Gulf War and Health” Expected Soon

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials are awaiting receipt of the second in a series of scientific literature reviews prepared by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM) on agents or exposures experienced by Gulf War veterans. It is likely that this report, which will focus on pesticides and solvents used during the Gulf War, should be released shortly. (In fact, it may have already been released, but it was not at the time this newsletter was finalized.)

The independent scientific/medical review is required by two laws, Public Law 105-368 and 105-277, both enacted in late 1998. The IOM is a highly prestigious scientific organization that is not part of the Federal Government.

The IOM review is being conducted by an 11-member committee chaired by Jack M. Colwill, M.S., Interim Dean, School of Medicine, Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland. Joseph V. Rodricks, Managing Director, Life Sciences Consultancy LLC, chairs the pesticide panel. Anthony L. Komaroff, M.D., and Laura Stewart Welch, M.D. co-chair the solvents panel. Dr. Komaroff is Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical Publications, Countway Library of Medicine, Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Dr. Welch is the Director, Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Adjunct Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health, Washington Hospital Center.

## About the “Review”

The “Gulf War Review” is written by VA’s Environmental Agents Service (EAS). The “Review” is published to provide information about the concerns of Gulf War veterans, their families, and others interested in possible long-term health consequences of military service in the Gulf War. The “Review” describes actions by VA and others to respond to these concerns. For past and current issues of the “Review” and additional information, see our Web site at [www.va.gov/gulfwar](http://www.va.gov/gulfwar).

The most recent issues of the newsletter are dated March 2002 and June 2002. Additional issues will be prepared when warranted by significant developments. EAS anticipates publication of the “Review” three or four times annually. Four were issued in Calendar Year 2001. This issue was completed in late August 2002 and does not include developments that occurred after that time. Printing and distribution was delayed due to budgetary constraints.

Comments or questions concerning the content of the “Review” are encouraged. Suggestions and ideas for future issues of the newsletter should be sent to Donald J. Rosenblum, Deputy Director, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of this and/or future issues should also be sent to Mr. Rosenblum. A limited supply of the prior issues is available. Please specify the quantity and issue date requested.

Questions about the Gulf War Registry examination should be directed to the Registry Coordinator or Registry Physician at the nearest VA medical facility. The telephone number can be found in the local telephone directory under the “U.S. Government” listings. Assistance is also available from the toll-free VA Gulf War Helpline: 1-800-749-8387.

## Independent Study Guide on Gulf War Veterans Health on the Web

The recently completed continuing medical education program entitled “A Guide to Gulf War Veterans’ Health,” prepared by VA’s Environmental Agents Service together with VA’s Employee Education System, is now on the world wide web at [www.va.gov/gulfwar/docs/VHIGulfwar.pdf](http://www.va.gov/gulfwar/docs/VHIGulfwar.pdf). This self study guide was created by VA to keep VA health care providers up-to-date on Gulf War health issues.

The module is one of ten available so far as part of the Veterans Health Initiative (VHI). The VHI program is an effort to help health care professionals understand the unique concerns of veterans, including the health problems associated with Agent Orange.

In addition to the Gulf War program, the independent study guides are available on the following topics:

- Cold Injury
- Agent Orange
- Hearing Impairment
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Prisoners of War
- Radiation
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Traumatic Amputation and Prosthetics
- Visual Impairment and Blindness

The modules feature health issues, photos of military scenes, illustrations, bibliographies, and in some case, moving testimonials by veterans, in addition to a review of medical management of the condition. At the end, readers can take an online test on their knowledge of the subject. All of these programs can be seen at [www.va.gov/VHI](http://www.va.gov/VHI).

“Having a better understanding of how certain health problems are linked to military service and the recommended evaluation and treatment approaches will enhance care for veterans,” explains Dr. Susan Mather, VA’s Public Health and Environmental Hazards Chief Officer, whose staff is spearheading the VHI with the help of experts throughout VA and in collaboration with the VA’s Employee Education System.

“Health care providers from VA and the Department of Defense can earn continuing education credits for completing the modules, but all health care professionals who care for veterans will gain from reading the material,” she adds.

## New Publications for Veterans of Vietnam and Afghanistan

In addition to this newsletter and several other publications for Gulf War veterans and their families, the Environmental Agents Service at VA Central Office in Washington, DC, has produced similar items addressing a range of health issues for veterans exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam and for veterans who served in Afghanistan.

Materials on Agent Orange include the Agent Orange Review newsletter, a fact sheet series known as Agent Orange Briefs, and a general information brochure. The brochure is available in Spanish as well as English. Materials for Afghanistan veterans include a questions-and-answers fact sheet and a fact sheet on health care and assistance.

Interested veterans (and others) can see this information on our web sites at [www.va.gov/agentorange](http://www.va.gov/agentorange) and [www.va.gov/enviroagents](http://www.va.gov/enviroagents) or contact the nearest VA medical center, or the Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

### Address Changed? Receiving Multiple Copies?

If you have recently moved, please use this form to update our mailing list. Send the completed form to the Gulf War Review, Austin Automation Center (200/397A), 1615 Woodward Street, Austin, TX 78772-0001.

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If you are receiving more than one copy of the newsletter, please let us know. Write to the address above. Please provide your name, address, and social security number.

Thank you.

## **Gulf War Health Registry Examination Statistics**

Here are some figures, as of August 26, 2002, regarding the VA's Gulf War Registry Health Examination Program that began in 1992.

### **Cumulative**

Total number of veterans who have completed examinations since the start of the program – **84, 239**

Total number of veterans tested for exposure to depleted uranium – **241**

Total number of dependents examinations – **1,380**  
(Spouses **567**, Children **813**)

### **Most Recent Month**

Initial Gulf War Registry Examinations last month — **111**

### **Q's and A's**

The "Review" occasionally includes a questions-and-answers section in which VA responds to inquiries from readers regarding the Gulf War experience, problems experienced by Gulf War veterans and their families, and programs initiated by VA and other Federal departments or agencies to help these veterans and their families.

Questions should be sent to Mr. Donald J. Rosenblum, Deputy Director, Environmental Agents Service (131), ATTN: Gulf War Review – Q's & A's, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

**Q.** We frequently receive questions about examination eligibility. R.Z. recently asked: Can a Gulf War era vet take the examination because he was inoculated for deployment, but never went? M.K. from Cincinnati, posed a similar question: Is a veteran who was never deployed to the Gulf War theater, but [who] was in the service at the time and worked on tanks that came back, eligible for the Gulf War Registry exam?

**A.** No and no. The veteran must have been in the Gulf War theater of operations. Era veterans who did not serve in the Gulf are not eligible. However, if the veteran is eligible for health care under another authority, he or she can receive a comparable examination, but will not be included in the Registry. If these veterans would like copies of the Gulf War Review mailed to them, we can include them on our mailing list. Veterans and others also can access our internet website – [www.va.gov/gulfwar](http://www.va.gov/gulfwar) — for these reviews.

**Q.** Another common question deals with co-payments. When do co-payments apply?

**A.** Nancy L. Howard, Director, Policy and Procedures Service, VA Revenue Office, VA Central Office, provided the following information: As with any condition related to a veteran's exposure or experience, the health care provider needs to document that the condition being treated is related to their exposure/experience. There is a question on the encounter form that should be marked yes or no as to whether the condition being treated is related to exposure/experience. If this question is not marked or is marked no, the veteran will be charged applicable co-payments. If the question is marked yes, the applicable co-payments are not generated. The health care provider should also document this in the patient's medical record. There is no other automatic way to prevent co-payment billing when the veteran is NSC (non-service connected) and is receiving treatment for conditions related to his or her exposure/experience.

## **Gulf War Research Advisory Committee Holds Second Meeting, Issues Interim Report**

On June 25, 2002, the VA's Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses held its second meeting and issued an interim report with conclusions and recommendations for consideration by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and other key VA officials. Both Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi and Deputy Secretary Leo S. Mackay, Jr., participated in the meeting and expressed their appreciation for the contributions made by the committee members.

The Committee offered a number of recommendations in their interim report. The major recommendations are listed below.

- Use all available methods to identify and evaluate treatments that may hold promise for the unexplained illnesses experienced by Gulf War veterans.
- Enlist the expertise of specialists in neurobiology and neurological illness in the national research effort on Gulf War illnesses.
- Designate as a research priority the investigation of neurological mechanisms ...that potentially explain the disease process and may lead to the development of treatments.

- Establish a research program to identify objective markers in ill veterans or subsets of ill veterans, and to investigate linkages between markers, exposures, and health status.
- Make full use of existing data on veterans' health and treatments. Merge Department of Defense (DoD) databases on veterans' locations and exposures with the Veterans Benefits Administration's database on veterans' health claims and diagnoses and with the DoD's Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program database, the VA's Gulf War Registry database, and data from the VA's National Survey of Persian Gulf Veterans.
- Manage for results. Create a single business plan to drive the research program, identifying objectives and milestones, and revising at least annually. Open all research solicitations to open competition, allowing external as well as internal researchers to participate. Make peer review practices more open on the model of NIH peer review practices.
- Increase funding. The opportunity to achieve a potential breakthrough in defeating Gulf War illnesses through neuroscience research, the potential contribution to defeating other neurological diseases like ALS, and the need to protect current American forces and civilians as well as treat veterans, merits an increase in funding from current levels.

### **Additional Information Available**

For additional information about the committee, including the full membership, see the March 2002 issue of this newsletter, or the VA Web site at [www.va.gov/opa/](http://www.va.gov/opa/) for the January 23, 2002, news release. The initial meeting of the committee was held on April 11-12, 2002. For information about that meeting, see the June issue of this newsletter. For information about the committee, or past/future meetings, contact Ms. Laura O'Shea, Committee Manager, at Department of Veterans Affairs (008A1), 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

### **New Area Offices Set Up to Improve VA Services to Veterans**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced a new field structure for supervising the administration of financial benefits for veterans. This new organization stresses accountability and will promote consistency in operations as VA moves to implement reforms in claims processing to speed up services for veterans.

VA developed four subdivisions for its national network of regional offices that administer veterans' benefits in compensation, pension, vocational rehabilitation and employment and other financial benefits. Four offices will be based in the field within their respective geographic areas, each coordinating operations of 12 to 16 regional offices. The directors of the new area offices will report to the Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations in Washington, DC.

The new field structure replaces a former "service delivery network" of 9 groupings of the 57 regional offices reporting to two officials in Washington, one for the eastern part of the country, and the other for the west.

The changes were recommended by a task force commissioned last year to improve efficiency. The task force called for the new structure to provide clear lines of communication and to ensure uniform implementation of directives. The task force found that the loose organization of the prior groupings of regional offices did not provide an effective span of control. By contrast, the new area directors will have line authority over their group of regional offices to ensure greater accountability.

## Where to Get Help

**Active duty military** personnel with questions or concerns about their service in the Persian Gulf region - contact your commanding officer or call the Department of Defense (DoD) Gulf War Veterans' Hotline (1-800-796-9699) for an examination.

**Gulf War veterans** with concerns about their health - contact the nearest VA medical center. The telephone number can be found in the local telephone directory under Department of Veterans Affairs in the "U.S. Government" listings. A Gulf War Registry examination will be offered. Treatment will be provided to eligible veterans. The VA Gulf War Information Helpline can also provide the latest information and assistance. The toll-free telephone number is 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Gulf War veterans in need of **marital/family counseling** - contact the nearest VA medical center or VA vet center. For additional information, call the Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Gulf War veterans seeking **disability compensation** for illnesses incurred in or aggravated by military service - contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility at 1-800-827-1000, or call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Gulf War veterans seeking participation for their **spouses or children** in the VA-funded health examination program for spouses and children - call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387). Veterans interested in the alternative self-funded examination for spouses or children - contact the Gulf War Registry Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center for forms and information.

**Gulf War veterans interested in learning about the wide range of benefit programs** administered by VA - contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility at 1-800-827-1000, or call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Anyone with first-hand information about **"incidents"** that occurred in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Gulf War that may be related to health problems experienced by military personnel who served in the War - call the DoD "Incidents" Hotline at 1-800-472-6719.

Veterans who have been diagnosed with a motor neuron disease (including **amyotrophic lateral sclerosis** or **Lou Gehrig's disease**) and who were on active duty between August 2, 1990, and July 31, 1991, regardless of whether they actually served in the Gulf War theater of operations (or family/friends of veterans who are deceased or otherwise unable to contact VA) - call 1-877-DIAL-ALS (1-877-342-5257) to participate in a national survey.

For additional information about VA's program initiatives, see VA's Gulf War **veterans' illnesses** home page at [www.va.gov/gulfwar](http://www.va.gov/gulfwar).

Gulf War veterans who **encounter difficulties** at a VA medical facility can contact the **"patient advocate"** at that facility for assistance in resolving the problem. The medical center telephone operator should have the telephone number.

Representatives of **veterans service organizations**, including the American Legion (1-800-433-3318), Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (1-800-VFW-1899), Disabled American Veterans (1-877-426-2838), etc., may also be very helpful to Gulf War veterans, especially veterans who are seeking disability compensation.



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