

On 28-29 April 2016, the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses held a two-day meeting at the Capital Hilton Hotel, 1001 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC. Out of the 16 current members, 11 attended in person, 2 telephonically, and 3 members were not available. The VHA representatives included: Dr. David Atkins, Acting Chief, VHA Office of Research & Development (ORD); Dr. Robert Jaeger, VHA/ORD; Dr. Victor Kalasinsky, VA Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and Gulf War research portfolio manager; and Drs. Peter Rumm and Aaron Schneiderman from Post-Deployment Health Services.

The focus for this meeting was two recently released Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports, a roundtable discussion with Veterans, and updates regarding ongoing VA research projects. The eight new Committee members were introduced, and those present were given their Certificates of Appointment.

Before the presentations, Dr. Hauser led discussions about the draft recommendations from the September meeting and the 2015 Annual Report. The recommendations and report were unanimously approved by the Committee.

The IOM study, Gulf War and Health, Vol 10, generated considerable, and sometimes heated, discussion. Some RAC members and many Veterans took issue with some of the IOM's recommendations. The RAC is considering making recommendations that are contrary to certain IOM recommendations. It will be necessary to hold a teleconference meeting, probably in June 2016, to finalize those recommendations.

The roundtable discussion involved the RAC members and representatives from five VSOs: Carlos Fuentes (VFW), Anthony Hardie (VCS), Shurhonda Love (DAV), Denise Nichols (NVAWVC), and George (NGWRC). Each Veteran made a statement, and a general discussion followed.

Annual Ethics Training for RAC members was provided by Carol Borden of the Office of General Counsel.

The last portion of each day was set aside for public comments; seven Veterans made comments on 28 April, and ten did so on 29 April.

Dr. Hauser indicated that the next in-person meeting would be in the August-September timeframe in the San Francisco area to encourage Veterans in other parts of the country to attend.

Overall, the meeting was very productive. Veterans participated in discussions (roundtable) and many attendees made positive comments regarding the diversity of views and expertise that the new members brought to the Committee. Below is a summary from the presentations.

Agenda Topics:

1. IOM Report: Gulf War and Health, Volume 10
 - *Briefer:* Dr. Herman Gibb, Gibb Epidemiology Consulting
 - *Discussion:* Volume 10 is an update of Volumes 4 and 8, all of which deal with the “health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War.” The conclusions were similar to those in Volume 8, although not all of the recommendations were well-received by Veterans and advocates. The two that were discussed extensively were (1) that future studies should recognize the connections between the brain and physical functioning, and (2) that further studies to determine cause-and-effect relationships between exposures and Veterans’ health conditions should not be undertaken. Instead, the IOM suggested that research regarding treatments should be VA’s focus. The other six recommendations were less contentious and briefly discussed.
2. IOM Report: Designing a Neurological Study
 - *Briefer:* Dr. Barbara Vickrey, Icahn School of Medicine, Mount Sinai
 - *Discussion:* A 2008 law directed VA to contract the IOM to conduct an epidemiological study of neurologic diseases. The IOM committee spent one year to determine that such a study was neither feasible nor necessary. Dr. Vickrey summarized the IOM committee’s processes and conclusions. Had the study been feasible, it would have been accomplished during the second and third years of the contract with IOM.
3. VA/DoD Millennium Cohort Collaboration
 - *Briefer:* Dr. Bennett Porter, Naval Health Research Center
 - *Discussion:* The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) began in 2001 and is the largest DoD database of active-duty personnel that involves re-contacting enrollees and adding new groups every 3-4 years. VA and DoD have begun a collaboration to analyze MCS data from a Veteran-centric perspective. Initial projects involve the analysis of DoD and VA data for Gulf War Veterans.
4. Gulf War Veterans Longitudinal Study
 - *Briefer:* Dr. Erin Dursa, VA Post-Deployment Health Services
 - *Discussion:* Dr. Dursa described Gulf War research activities in the Post-Deployment Health Services Epidemiology Program. Their January 2016 publication dealt with the 2013 survey which is a follow-up to the 1995 and 2005 surveys of GW Veterans. She discussed additional ongoing analyses of the survey data and a proposed clinical-epidemiological study of migraines in GW Veterans.
5. Cooperative Studies Program 585: Biorepository Project
 - *Briefer:* Dr. Dawn Provenzale, VA CSP Epidemiology Center - Durham
 - *Discussion:* This VA-funded study recruited 1267 participants in its recently-completed pilot phase. Surveys, health records, and a blood sample were collected for each participant for use in future research. Before launching the full study, the processes and data from the pilot study will be analyzed, and input from Veteran focus groups will be used to improve the processes.