

Annual Report
Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses
December 2013

1. Origin and Membership

The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses was established by Congress pursuant to Public Law 105-368. Members are appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Committee members who served in 2013 are listed in Appendix A.

2. Committee Activities

The Committee held two meetings in 2013: a teleconference on February 4, 2013, and a meeting in Washington, DC on June 17-18. A third meeting scheduled for November was deferred because of the federal shutdown.

The February 4 teleconference reviewed the first draft of a report updating the comprehensive scientific report published by the Committee in 2008, *Gulf War Illness and the Health of Gulf War Veterans: Scientific Findings and Recommendations*. Detailed comments were obtained from members, to be incorporated in the next draft. The Committee also discussed the 2013 IOM report on treatments for chronic multisymptom illness and VA staff's reported initiation of a new IOM report to establish a case definition of Gulf War illness through a literature review, which VA staff was unable to comment on. The Committee recommended that the case definition instead be developed jointly by VA and the DoD CDMRP Gulf War Illness research program, using the customary scientific approach for developing a case definition: appointing a committee of experts in the illness to develop the definition using rigorous data analysis.

On March 13, two members of the Committee, Dr. Lea Steele of Baylor University, and Mr. Anthony Hardie, a Gulf War veteran, testified to a hearing of the

House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. It was the ninth appearance by Committee members before Congressional committees, including three other hearings of the same subcommittee under different leadership in 2009 and 2010. The Committee has been non-partisan in its activities throughout its history.

Prior to the June meeting of the Committee, the charter of the Committee was revised to eliminate the Committee's function to review the effectiveness of government research, to eliminate the standard that the effectiveness of the research should be judged by whether it improves the health of Gulf War veterans, and to eliminate provisions providing the Committee with its own independent staff. At the meeting, a VA leadership representative stated that the reasons for the changes were that the Committee had been operating outside its charter, but he could provide no examples.

Two veteran members of the Committee resigned and left the meeting. The other members recommended that the charter changes be rescinded. They regarded the charter changes to eliminate the independence and oversight of the Committee as the latest example of recent VA staff actions to "fundamentally reverse the progress that has been made in understanding and addressing Gulf War illnesses" and the staff's retaliation against the Committee for having drawn attention to these actions.

The meeting's scientific agenda included presentations on promising new research studies, particularly focusing on treatment pilot studies and studies to identify mechanisms underlying Gulf War illness that can present targets for treatment. There was a round table discussion regarding treatment candidates including guest speakers, Committee members, and VA staff.

Both meetings were open to the public. Time was reserved to allow members of the public to provide comments on the Committee's work and on matters related to the health of Gulf War veterans.

Committee members have been active participants in all aspects of the Committee's work. Meetings have been well-attended. Members have devoted substantial time outside of meetings, including working on the update to the 2008 report.

The Committee has kept VA leadership and the Office of Research and Development (ORD) informed of its work and findings on an ongoing basis. This task has been accomplished through attendance and participation of ORD and OPH officials at Committee meetings, and ongoing communications between the Committee chairman, scientific director and associate scientific director, and the Secretary's Office, ORD, and Dr. Robert Jesse, VA Principal Deputy Undersecretary for Health.

3. Support Activities

Responsibility for providing scientific and administrative support to the Committee was provided by the Boston University School of Public Health, Department of Environmental Health, through a contract with the Bedford, Massachusetts VAMC. Committee member Dr. Roberta White currently serves as Scientific Director, and Dr. Kimberly Sullivan serves as Associate Scientific Director. In addition to ongoing activities relating to monitoring research relating to Gulf War veterans health, preparation of Committee reports, development of Committee meetings, and preparation of meeting minutes, the staff has primary responsibility for Committee administrative activities and management of the Committee's website.

4. Designated Federal Officer

The Designated Federal Officer for the Committee is Dr. Victor Kalasinski, who also serves as manager for the Gulf War Health portfolio within the VA Office of Research and Development.

5. Accomplishments

The Committee has continued to serve as a catalyst, bringing together VA and non-VA researchers in Gulf War illness and related fields, Committee members, VA and DoD/CDMRP staff, and interested Congressional staff, to discuss, refine, and extend the understanding of the illness for the purpose of identifying treatments. Scientific progress has significantly accelerated in recent years. The Committee has completed the revised draft of its update report on that progress, which will be discussed at a meeting of the Committee on January 7-8, 2014 in Washington.

This progress is fundamentally threatened by the actions of elements of VA and DoD staff over the past two years to re-establish the scientifically discredited position that Gulf War veterans have no special health problems. Prior to that time, the Committee had been applauding the progress being made in VA's Gulf War research program and in bringing other VA programs in line with current research understandings. These developments are described in detail in Appendix B.

It would be the ultimate tragedy for Gulf War veterans if research were to be again misled, just as science is finally turning the corner.

Appendix A
Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses
2013 Committee Members

Chairman

James H. Binns, former Chairman, Parallel Design, Inc.; former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense; Phoenix, Arizona.

Committee Members

Carrolee Barlow, MD, PhD, Vice President Biology Research, Brain Cells, Inc., San Diego, California.

Floyd E. Bloom, MD, Professor Emeritus, Molecular and Integrative Neuroscience Department, The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, California.

Beatrice A. Golomb, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Medicine and of Family Preventative Medicine, University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, California.

Joel C. Graves, Anglican priest and Captain, U.S. Army (Retired); 1990-1991 Gulf War veteran, Lacey, Washington.

Anthony Hardie; 1990-1991 Gulf War veteran, Madison, Wisconsin. (resigned June 2013)

Marguerite L. Knox, MN, NP, LTC South Carolina National Guard Medical Command; 1990-1991 Gulf War veteran, Hopkins, South Carolina. (resigned June 2013)

William J. Meggs, MD, PhD, Professor and Chief, Division of Toxicology, The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

James P. O'Callaghan, PhD, Head of Molecular Neurotoxicology, Toxicology and Molecular Biology Branch, Health Effects Laboratory Division, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-NIOSH, Morgantown, West Virginia.

Lea Steele, PhD, Associate Professor, Institute of Biomedical Studies, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Roberta White, PhD, Chair and Professor, Department of Environmental Health, Boston University School of Public Health; Scientific Director, Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, Boston, Massachusetts.

Consultant to the Committee

Jack Melling, PhD, Consultant to the United States Government Accountability Office,
Salisbury, United Kingdom.