



Veteran Engagement Session #3

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

VA Medical Center Atlanta, GA

February 3-4, 2020

Presented by Drew A. Helmer, MD, MS to the RAC GWVI on July 7, 2020



Context

- Goal- to provide greater opportunity for broader and more diverse input from Veterans and caregivers
- Four Scheduled Veteran Engagement Sessions (VES)
 - Houston, TX Feb 5-6, 2019
 - Cleveland, OH Apr 16-17, 2019
 - Atlanta, GA Feb 3-4, 2020
 - Birmingham, AL Apr 1-2, 2020 (POSTPONED)
- Summary of first two VES presented and discussed
 - Washington, DC June 11-12, 2019



VES #3



- Subcommittee members
 - Larry Steinman, Karen Block, Drew Helmer, Steve Hunt, Kim Adams (by phone), Brent Casey, Marylyn Harris, Bill Watts
- Planned talking points
 - Health concerns, Quality of Life, Research issues, What do you want the VA Secretary to know?, Local and National Resources
- Format
 - Two 3-hour sessions over two days (4-7pm on Day 1, 10am-1pm on Day 2)
 - In person and teleconference



Key points- Health Concerns

- Are we missing any rare conditions that are more prevalent in GWVs?
- Are GWVs aging more rapidly?
 - Are common conditions of aging starting earlier?
 - Are common conditions of aging progressing more rapidly?
- Will the children and grandchildren of GWVs experience health problems?



Key Points- Quality of Life

- Quality of VA Care = Quality of Life
 - Various deficiencies in the provision of care to GWVs
 - Lack of diagnostic codes, no GW deployment indicator, lack of awareness of GW-related health concerns among providers, lack of specialized knowledge
 - Lack of awareness of GW-related health concerns within VHA
 - Lack of trust in VA
- Concerns about VA Care in the Community (MISSION Act) and how it will relate to care for GWVs
- Women and homeless GWVs have special needs that are not being addressed adequately
- Not a lot of support for caregivers and family of GWVs



Key Points- Research Issues

- Translate research findings into clinical practice
- Focus on improving quality of life for GWVs
 - Issues related to aging in GWVs
 - Intergenerational effects
- Learn from the experience of GWVs and be more proactive about adverse health consequences for other deployments
- Facilitate GWV engagement with research
 - More outreach/marketing of research participation opportunities
 - Enhance coverage of travel to participate in research
- Share findings of research more broadly



Key Points – What should VA Secretary know?



- All GWVs need consistent, high quality, proactive care
 - Greater awareness among all VHA providers
 - More specialists- clinician experts who can provide care for GWVs
 - GWV patient advocates
- Prioritize important research, such as intergenerational effects of deployment
- Engage GWVs in quality improvement and research
- Ensure access to complementary and integrative health services



Cross-cutting Themes



- Shift in research priorities
 - Translational research
 - Animal to human
 - Efficacy into practice
 - Intergenerational effects
 - Link between GWI and aging
- Improve the system of care for GWVs
 - More consistent, systematic, and proactive
 - Better access to specialized care and services
 - Coordination with VA Care in the Community
- Share research findings more broadly/loudly
- Enhance GWV engagement in research and system reform
 - Special attention to women and homeless Veterans within GWV cohort



Questions/Discussion