

WRIISC Advantage

SPRING/SUMMER 2017

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Improving VA and Community Provider Care for

OUR VETERANS

Veterans' health experts at the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) remain at the forefront of advancing knowledge for high priority, deployment, and exposure-related topics in the Veteran community. This edition of *WRIISC Advantage* discusses our current initiatives to better equip health care providers to care for Veterans with exposure concerns and much more!

The Directors' Corner

ONE OF RECENTLY appointed Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary David Shulkin's top five priorities for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is to be a "high performance network" or one which provides the highest quality health care for Veterans. The WRIISC, a national program that is part of VA's Post Deployment Health Services (PDHS) of VHA, is contributing to this goal by providing expertise and supporting the education of health care team members about deployment health and military related exposure concerns of Veterans.

Servicemembers can experience a wide range of exposures during military service. The complexity and number of exposure concerns can make it difficult for primary care providers to obtain accurate, up to date information and may fall outside their expertise. Our goal is to ensure that providers are aware that the WRIISC can help with questions about health effects possibly related to deployment or military exposures. We do this through several means.

FIRST, you're reading the WRIISC Advantage, the newsletter we publish three times a year. We cover deployment and exposure concerns of relevance to Veterans and their providers in every issue and reiterate the WRIISC mission to be a resource for these concerns.

SECOND, we partner with our colleagues in PDHS on their communications to VHA providers and directly to Veterans, including the registry newsletters, communications to priority Veteran groups, and the Public Health website (<http://www.publichealth.va.gov>).

THIRD, a number of our monthly webinars for VA providers and staff address exposure-related subjects. These are publicized in a variety of ways to thousands of providers and offer providers a chance to learn about these topics and WRIISC services and resources. Recent webinars have focused on Gulf War Illness (GWI), Airborne Hazards and burn pit smoke

In closing, the WRIISC program is committed to building a network of clinicians able to better address Veterans' health concerns. As the directors of the three sites, we work together to promote the WRIISC mission of education, clinical care, research, and risk communication and continue to serve Veterans and their health care team!

Drew Helmer, MD, MS
Director, NJ WRIISC

Wes Ashford, MD, PhD
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Check out the Public Health website for the latest on many exposure topics; the Exposure Ed App is currently available to providers and Veterans through Apple's iTunes store <https://mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed> and is an excellent information source.

concerns, garrison exposures, and registry exams. We also offer classes and look for ways to get information directly to Veterans on the issues—stay tuned!

FOURTH, we use other communication and dissemination channels offered by VHA. Through these methods we hear and respond to clinicians who are providing deployment-related care. These are accessible to providers inside and outside VHA (read more about our e-learning in our "Around the WRIISC News" feature on page 7).

FINALLY, and most importantly, we listen! We review every consult placed for specialized WRIISC clinical services to understand both the providers' reasons for a referral and the concerns of Veterans. We also regularly receive queries from providers and patients through our website's contact page.

WRIISC: Addressing Deployment-Related Exposure Concerns for Veterans

OUR CLINICAL TEAM has extensive medical experience helping Veterans with their exposure concerns and potential health effects. When a Veteran is referred to the WRIISC, our team may determine the Veteran would benefit from an environmental exposure assessment. An occupational medicine physician or nurse practitioner experienced in exposure issues takes a lifetime exposure history of the Veteran in complete detail, concentrating on deployment exposures, and carefully addresses each health concern. Veterans are then provided with a plan to move forward and offered supplemental educational material. The plan often includes recommendations to minimize future exposures that might increase the risk of a bad health effect. A Veteran's referring provider is given a copy of any recommendations to assist with continued care of the Veteran. We also offer educational classes at each WRIISC site on deployment-related exposure, such as Agent Orange. For local education offerings visit: <http://www.WarRelatedIllness.va.gov/education/local-offerings/index.asp>. 



Beyond Deployment: A Focus on Garrison Exposures and Camp Lejeune

WHILE DEPLOYMENT-RELATED EXPOSURES remain a top WRIISC priority, there are also instances when a Veteran may have an exposure concern not related to a deployment. The term garrison exposure refers to exposures that occur when a Veteran is stationed on a military base, usually in the U.S., and includes the potential for hazardous environmental exposure.

An important garrison exposure which has been a focus of media reports and received much attention by Veterans and VA is contaminated water at the U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. New presumptions have been established by VA for Camp Lejeune Veterans. In a Final Rule, created in January 2017 and effective in March 2017, VA established a presumptive service-connection for Veterans, Reservists, and National Guard members exposed to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days from August 1, 1953 through December 31, 1987, who later developed one of the following eight diseases:

- ▶ Adult leukemia
- ▶ Aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes
- ▶ Bladder cancer
- ▶ Kidney cancer
- ▶ Liver cancer
- ▶ Multiple myeloma
- ▶ Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- ▶ Parkinson's disease

Previously established by Congress and the President was the "Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012." In accordance with this law, VA provides health care for certain conditions at no charge to Veterans who served at least 30 days of active duty at Camp Lejeune from January 1, 1957 and December 31, 1987. Qualifying health conditions include:

- ▶ Esophageal cancer
- ▶ Breast cancer
- ▶ Kidney cancer
- ▶ Multiple myeloma
- ▶ Renal toxicity
- ▶ Female infertility
- ▶ Scleroderma
- ▶ Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- ▶ Lung cancer
- ▶ Bladder cancer
- ▶ Leukemia
- ▶ Myelodysplastic syndromes
- ▶ Hepatic steatosis
- ▶ Miscarriage
- ▶ Neurobehavioral effects

Family members of Veterans who resided at Camp Lejeune during the qualifying period may also be eligible for reimbursement of out-of-pocket medical expenses related to the 15 covered health conditions. For more information visit: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/camp-lejeune/index.asp>. 



PDHS recognizes the importance of addressing concerns that Veterans have regarding garrison exposures. PDHS works with other agencies, such as the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and the Department of Defense, as new information and studies become available.

Volunteer for Research at the WRIISC

THE WRIISC conducts cutting edge research to answer questions about the underlying mechanisms of disease and the effects of deployment on health. WRIISC also conducts studies of novel treatments for Gulf War Veterans (GWV) with GWI. Participating in a research study may provide information that will improve the lives of other Veterans in the future. Please consider volunteering for one of the following WRIISC research studies at a location near you!

For all NJ WRIISC studies call 1-800-248-8005 and indicate the study and person specified in contact information. For DC and CA WRIISC use the contact information provided at the end of each study description. Some studies may offer compensation.

JOINT SITE STUDIES- NJ, DC, & CA WRIISC

For Gulf War Veterans

► WRIISC as a Model of Care for Chronic Multi-Symptom Illness

POPULATION: GWV with symptoms of GWI who have an upcoming appointment with a provider at a primary care clinic or WRIISC

PURPOSE: Investigate how providers and GWV think and talk about GWI.

CONTACT: Call your local WRIISC and ask about the "Communication Study."

NJ WRIISC

For Gulf War Veterans

► Gulf War Vestibular Study

POPULATION: GWV

PURPOSE: Determine if underlying balance issues are seen in GWV and determine if the balance system can be improved by using a low level electrical stimulation via electrodes placed on the ears.

CONTACT: Faria Sanjana

► Small-fiber Polyneuropathy in Veterans with GWI

POPULATION: GWV

PURPOSE: Determine the presence of small-fiber polyneuropathy in Veterans with GWI and develop screening tools to help assist in diagnosis.

CONTACT: Maran Shaker

► Cognitive Rehabilitation for GWI

POPULATION: GWV who have symptoms of GWI

PURPOSE: Determine if 12 weeks of telephone-delivered problem-solving therapy can reduce disability in GWV with GWI.

CONTACT: Christina Gonzalez

► Development of Dietary Polyphenol Preparations for Treating Veterans with GWI

POPULATION: GWV who have symptoms of GWI

PURPOSE: Investigate the potential of daily Concord grape juice consumption in alleviating clinical symptoms in Veterans with GWI.

CONTACT: Will Van Doren

► Vagus Nerve Stimulation: A Non-Invasive Treatment to Improve the Health of GWVs with GWI

POPULATION: GWV who have symptoms of GWI including widespread pain

PURPOSE: Determine if use of a hand-held device that activates a nerve called the Vagus Nerve reduces widespread pain.

CONTACT: Sara Tom

► Post-Exertional Malaise in GWI: Brain, Autonomic and Behavioral Interactions

POPULATION: GWV and Veterans who served but were not deployed between 1989 and 1994

PURPOSE: Use brain imaging and ultrasound techniques to examine different aspects of a Veteran's nervous and immune systems and determine how function is affected by exercise.

CONTACT: Duncan Ndirangu

► Mitochondrial Dysfunction and GWI

POPULATION: GWV and Veterans enlisted but not deployed between 1989 and 1994

PURPOSE: Utilize blood samples to study part of the body's cells that helps produce energy (called mitochondria) to determine whether cells are damaged, how well they function, and how they correspond to symptoms.

CONTACT: Duncan Ndirangu

For Veterans of All Eras

► Vestibular Consequences of Blast Related Injury Study

POPULATION: Open to Veterans of all eras

PURPOSE: Measure balance using a state of the art rotational chair designed by NASA, as well as brain blood flow (through a non-invasive ultrasound technique), to better understand effects of head trauma.

CONTACT: Yaa Haber

► SARA Study

POPULATION: Open to Veterans of all eras

PURPOSE: Assess the ability of a hand-held device to quickly evaluate sensory and motor function and see who will benefit from rehabilitation therapy.

CONTACT: Leslie DeLa Cruz

► Treatment of Vestibular Dysfunction using a Portable Stimulator

POPULATION: Open to Veterans of all eras

PURPOSE: Examine whether applying low levels of electrical stimulation, via electrodes placed behind the ears, can improve balance function.

CONTACT: Leslie DeLa Cruz

► Role of Cerebral Blood Flow in Nausea and Motion Sickness

POPULATION: Veterans of all eras and civilians, age 18-59

PURPOSE: Assess how blood flow changes when people are rotated in a chair that might increase motion sickness.

CONTACT: Maran Shaker

► TBI Relaxation Study

POPULATION: Veterans with a history of traumatic brain injury (TBI) between the ages of 18-50

PURPOSE: Use relaxation techniques to investigate how the inner ear and the part of the nervous system that regulates unconscious behaviors (breathing, blood pressure, heart rate, etc.) are working together and how much each of these systems is contributing to symptoms experienced by Veterans with TBI.

CONTACT: Apollonia Fox

DC WRIISC

For Gulf War Veterans

► Gulf War Complementary Alternative Medicine Study (CAM) Study

POPULATION: GWV

PURPOSE: Investigate whether CAM can provide improvement for GWI specifically looking at chronic pain, fatigue, and cognitive impairments.

CONTACT: Study team, 202-745-8000, ext 5-5768

CA WRIISC

For Gulf War Veterans

► Yoga and Group Treatment for Chronic Pain in GWV

POPULATION: Open to Veterans who served in the military in 1990-1991 regardless of deployment and have chronic pain

PURPOSE: Compare two non-drug treatments for chronic pain in GWI: Yoga and a pain management wellness group for chronic pain.

CONTACT: Rachael Cho, 650-665-0159

For Veterans of All Eras

► Breathing Meditation Intervention for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

POPULATION: Open to all Veterans with PTSD with no diagnosis of severe TBI or uncontrolled seizure disorder

PURPOSE: Compare a group treatment using breathing-based meditation with cognitive processing therapy, a well-established one-on-one talk therapy.

CONTACT: Julia Tang, 650-785-6661

► Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation to Improve Cognitive Function in TBI

POPULATION: Individuals who are between the ages of 20 and 65 with a history of TBI

PURPOSE: Evaluate Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) a method of delivering therapeutic, non-invasive brain stimulation as a treatment for Veterans with mild to moderate TBI.

CONTACT: Girish R. Swaminath, 650-852-3233. 📧

Around the WRIISC News



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DC WRIISC

Helping Veterans One by One

THE DC WRIISC is proud to share some very positive feedback from a Veteran who recently attended our clinical program. The Veteran sent a thank you letter after his visit and reported that he was greeted with "the highest levels of medical professionalism and expertise"

by our WRIISC clinicians during his visit. Additionally, he felt that "the medical discoveries [made by our team] may lead to an extended quality of life" for him. Furthermore, the Veteran was impressed with the individual attention and care he received in all of the steps he took before the scheduled evaluation. In summary, the Veteran stated, "The WRIISC is a promise kept [for excellence in health care offered to Veterans by VA]." Feedback such as this reinforces that our team is successfully meeting our WRIISC mission and goals. We are making a difference to one Veteran at a time and in the Veteran community as whole. Go team!

"The WRIISC is a promise kept [for excellence in health care offered to Veterans by VA]."

CA WRIISC

Establishment of a New Post Deployment Health Clinic

IN OCTOBER 2016, CA WRIISC implemented a new Post-Deployment Health Clinic (PDHC). The goal of the PDHC is to support

Veterans who have participated in the in-person, week-long, comprehensive, multidisciplinary clinical



evaluation at the CA WRIISC to achieve their health goals. Veterans who live within a 50-mile radius of the VA Palo Alto medical facility and who have military exposure concerns are invited to join the PDHC as an optional and complementary service after their in-person WRIISC evaluation. Veterans who choose this option meet with the director of the CA WRIISC for a six-month follow-up visit

after their initial WRIISC evaluation. During the follow-up visit the CA WRIISC director reviews any WRIISC recommendations with the Veteran, discusses progress, and answers additional questions. The Veteran and WRIISC director work together to address any barriers the Veteran is experiencing to implementing recommendations. The Veteran is also able to address additional post-deployment health concerns that have arisen since their initial visit. When appropriate, Veterans enrolled in the PDHC receive an additional follow-up visit to make certain they are well on their way to carrying out WRIISC recommendations and receiving the excellent care they deserve.

NJ WRIISC

Development of On Line Training for Providers

AS A NATIONAL RESOURCE for post-deployment health, the WRIISC has developed a series of web-based offerings (referred to as e-learning) as part of an educational curriculum for VHA and community health care providers. The modules provide important and clinically-relevant information about the issues faced by deployed Veterans. They provide useful resources to better address Veteran

health concerns regardless of where a Veteran receives care.

E-learning modules will be available to VA providers through the VHA's Talent Management System (TMS) and to VA and community providers via the Training Finder Real-Time Affiliate-Integrated Network (TRAIN), a free service of the Public Health Foundation supported by the VHA's Employee Education System (EES).

▶ The first module called "Assessing Deployment Related Environmental Exposures" focuses on health concerns related to exposures

Veterans may encounter while preparing for and during deployment and instructs the provider on how to assess and manage this key clinical need. To locate this module, search for TRAIN Course ID: 1070234 on the TRAIN website: <https://www.train.org>. Accreditation is offered.



Additional modules in the planning phase will focus on topics including understanding and managing GWI, and identification and management of chronic multi-symptom illness. All of the WRIISC e-learning modules are designed to ensure providers can deliver the care Veterans need. To learn more about WRIISC education efforts of providers and Veterans, visit: <http://www.WarRelatedIllness.va.gov/education/>.

ATTENTION READER: Do you prefer to receive the WRIISC Advantage newsletter electronically? Email us at wriisc.nj@va.gov with your full name and preferred email address.

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