

MINUTES OF THE VACO AD HOC STEERING COMMITTEE ON THE
TOXIC EFFECTS OF HERBICIDES

November 2, 1978

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:00 A.M.

2. Problems with Circular 10-78-219:

a. It has become clear that the Circular is not sufficiently explicit in its recommendations regarding the procedures for examining veteran patients potentially exposed to herbicides in Vietnam. Accordingly, the Committee has initiated the preparation of the necessary revisions in the Circular. Pending the completion of this revision, the VA medical centers will be kept informed via hot line of the improved approaches which are being contemplated.

b. It is now expected that the following changes will be made in the Circular:

1. All Vietnam veterans who receive care in a VA medical center will be queried regarding their potential exposure to herbicides. Those giving a positive response will be examined according to the procedures outlined in the Circular, and the data obtained from the examinations will be referred to VACO for further review and, if merited, included in the Herbicide Registry.

2. Since there continues to be no firm evidence of long-term toxicity in humans due to herbicide exposure, the VA will not conduct "outreach" activities in an attempt to induce Vietnam veterans to be examined under our program. If future investigations disclose scientifically acceptable evidence of long-term human herbicide toxicity, the VA could readily expand the scope of its efforts to obtain total examinations of all Vietnam veterans potentially exposed to herbicides.

3. The new Circular will also clarify the priority status of Vietnam veterans seeking examinations at VAMC's for potential herbicide toxicity. The clarification will assure that none of these veterans will be excluded from obtaining the indicated examinations due to their service-connected status.

3. Data from DOD on Use of Herbicides in Vietnam:

DOD is summarizing data from the 1974 NAS study on Herbicide Use in Vietnam concerning the geographic areas sprayed and the military units operating in these areas at the time of spraying. This data will be utilized by us in helping to determine whether a veteran claiming herbicide exposure was likely to have been in an area of Vietnam that was sprayed. It is now anticipated that the DOD data will reach us within the next month.

4. VACO Herbicide Registry: Efforts continue in VACO to establish this registry. We confidently expected that the registry will be operative concomitantly with the availability of data from the VAMC's on the examination of Vietnam veterans exposed to herbicides.

5. Activation of the Medical Oversight Committee:

This Committee's function is to review and monitor the reports from the VAMC's of the examination of veterans exposed to herbicides and to suggest approaches for providing appropriate follow-up for these veterans. It will commence its operation on November 8.

6. Progress in Chartering the VACO Advisory Committee on Herbicides:

It is our understanding that the VA's request for the Committee's charter is currently under review by the GSA. When the charter has been approved, the Committee will be promptly activated.

7. Study on Dioxin Levels in Body Fat:

a. Dr. Lyndon Lee joined the Committee to provide it with his advice on the conduct of this study. He made a series of suggestions on the study's design which will be adopted.

b. Dr. Hobson will continue his efforts to identify a coordinator for the project and to complete the project's design.

8. Dr. Jack Walsh presented his suggestion for the use of the "outpatient Routing and Statistical Activity Record" (i.e., VA Form 10-2875-2, dated August 1978), as the basis for following veterans examined in VAMC's for herbicide toxicity. The major current limitations of this approach are the relatively small amount of data that can be recorded on the form and the fact that statistics are collected on only 20% of the completed forms. However, it is expected that both of these limitations are capable of being corrected in the future. Dr. Walsh concluding his remarks by suggesting that a trial of the proposed use of the form be undertaken at those VAMC's with the optimal scanning capability that will allow 100% study of all completed forms. The Committee endorsed this suggestion.

9. Distribution of Information on Herbicides to VAMC Health Care Personnel:

The Committee continues to receive information that the educational materials distributed by VACO is not reaching VAMC staff expeditiously. It was agreed that VACO should enhance its efforts to assure that these materials are promptly and appropriately distributed. The additional strategy of depositing them in the Library of each VAMC will be explored.

10. Meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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