

Minutes of March 7, 1979

VACO STEERING COMMITTEE ON THE TOXIC EFFECTS OF HERBICIDES

1. The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM. The participants in attendance are listed in the Appendix.

2. Data was presented on numbers of Vietnam veterans presenting for examinations or filing claims for possible herbicide toxicity. A summary of this data follows:

Table 1

<u>Quarter Ending</u>	<u>Total # of Veterans Examined</u>	<u>No. thought Potentially to have A/O related Signs/Symptoms</u>
September 30, 1978	514	65 (12.6%)
December 30, 1978	653	52 (8.0%)
Totals	1,167	117 (10.0%)

Table 2

<u>Total Claims Filed for Herbicide Toxicity*</u>	<u>Number Allowed</u>	<u>Number Denied</u>	<u>In Process</u>
434	13 (3.0%)	269 (62.0%)	15.2 (35.0%)

*As of February 28, 1979

a. Table 1 indicates that a number of Vietnam veterans have been examined at our VAMC's for possible herbicide toxicity. However, only 10% of those examined were believed to have potential evidence of toxic effects of herbicides by the remaining physicians. It should be emphasized that the relationships between herbicide exposure and adverse health effects are purely hypothetical at this point. In no instance has this relationship been definitely demonstrated.

b. Table 2 shows the volume of claims for compensation for herbicide toxicity filed with DVB. As of February 28, 1979, 434 claims had been filed, and thus far, 3.0% of them have been allowed.

c. It appears that the number of veterans being examined for potential herbicide toxicity in the VAMC's is rising but the number of claims filed for compensation is declining.

3. The following items pertinent to progress made on the study on body fat levels of dioxin was presented.

a. The contract with Dr. Gross of the University of Nebraska for the chemical analysis of fat specimens is being actively processed in VACO. However, Dr. Gross has indicated his willingness to accept samples even before the contract is approved.

b. VAMC Hines has obtained approval of the study protocol by its Research and Development and its Human studies Committees. Other VAMC's in the Chicago area are also seeking such approval.

c. Drs. Lee and Hobson stated that it was impossible to predict the completion date of the study. However, they estimate that its completion will take anywhere from 3 to 9 months after initiation, depending upon the availability of suitable patient participants.

4. Autopsy materials from two patients with potential herbicide toxicity have been referred to the AFIP for review and storage. Dr. LeGolvan indicated that one of the two patients was Mr. Paul Reutershan whose claim as a herbicide-induced pancreatic cancer was controversial. Information on AFIP review of Mr. Reutershan's tissue specimens will be reported to the Committee when they are available.

5. The VA's Advisory Committee on Herbicide Toxicity has been approved by OMB. This Committee will be limited to 12-15 members, and will include experts from the VA, other federal agencies, universities, and the chemical industry. Its membership will be assembled following the mandatory publication of the Committee's statement of purpose in the Federal Register. At present, the Committee's activation is not expected to occur in less than 3 months.

6. The EPA has issued a ban on 2,4,5-T and Silvex on the basis of its review of human and animal studies of the

toxicity of these herbicides. The Committee discussed this ban and its effect upon the VA, and reached the following conclusions:

- a. The studies on which the EPA ban was based do not offer definitive evidence for an adverse effect of herbicides on human health.
- b. The ban could generate outside pressure for the VA to accept the postulated toxic effects of herbicides without further study.
- c. The Committee strongly recommends that the VA continue its efforts to gain valid data on herbicide toxicity and that it resist arguments against this approach based on what may be a premature decision by the EPA.

7. The tapes dealing with the geographic assignments of American troops in Vietnam which DOD promised to us some months ago, have still not been delivered. Mrs. diNunzio indicated that DOD is optimistic that the tapes can be delivered in the near future.

8. Mrs. diNunzio also reported that an analysis of VA medical records indicated that 126 out of the 500 names of participants in Operation Ranch Hand may have received services in the VA. The Committee will follow-up on this matter.

9. The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

RICHARD A. LEVINSON, M.D.

APPENDIX
VACO STEERING COMMITTEE ON HERBICIDE TOXICITY

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE MARCH 7, 1979 MEETING

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Title</u>
Mr. Stratton Appleman	Director for News and Liaison Information Service
Mr. Fred Conway	Attorney, General Council's Office
Mrs. Maureen diNunzio	Acting Assistant Director, Office of Management Services
Dr. Lawrence Hobson	Deputy ACMD for Research and Development
Dr. William Jacoby	Director, Medical Service
Ms. Margaret Kilduff	Medical Records Program Staff Chief
Mr. Alexander Kutner	Staff Assistant, Professional Services
Dr. Lyndon Lee	Surgical Service, VAMC Washington, D.C.
Dr. Paul LeGolvan	Deputy Director, Pathology Service
Dr. Richard A. Levinson	Deputy ACMD for Professional Services
Dr. Gerrit Schepers	Program Chief for Cardiopulmonary Diseases, Medical Service
Dr. John Walsh	Special Assistant, Operations Review and Analysis