

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE VACO STEERING
COMMITTEE ON HERBICIDE TOXICITY

April 3, 1979

1. The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m.
2. Participants at this meeting are listed in Appendix I.
3. The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. The only corrections to these minutes were offered by Dr. LeGolván. He pointed out that the statement in paragraph 4 of the minutes concerning the receipt by AFIP of the tissues of the patients' Cass and Reutershan was incorrect. Thus far the AFIP has not received these tissues. Since there is no known impediment to the submission of these tissues, inquiry will be made as to the reasons for the delay in their processing.
4. Response to Senator Cranston's Letter. The preliminary draft of the VA's response to the Senator's letter has been circulated to the Committee's membership and their comments on it have been obtained. A final version of the response, prepared on the basis of the Committee members' comments, will be completed in the near future.
5. Revision of Circular 10-78-219. This revision has not yet completed the required approval process. Renewed efforts will be made to expedite this process so that the revised circular might be released as soon as possible.
6. DOD Tapes on Herbicide Spraying Patterns in Vietnam.
 - a. Mr. Thomas Dashiell of DOD met with representatives from DVB and DM&S on April 3 to discuss the printouts of the DOD tape which contains the records of herbicide spraying in Vietnam. The minutes of this meeting are attached (see Appendix II).
 - b. As indicated in Appendix II, we will obtain data concerning the "history" of the several military units assigned to Vietnam during the period of herbicide spraying. When this data is matched to that of the herbicide spraying patterns, the VA will have at least approximate information.

c. It appears likely that the VA will have to assume the responsibility of making the military unit historical data computer compatible.

7. Operation Ranchhand. The Committee believes that medical follow-up of the individuals who were exposed to herbicides as part of Operation Ranchhand might provide important data on the long-term effects of herbicide exposure in humans. We have discussed the possibility of such a study with Mr. Dashall of DOD on an informal basis. It appears that we should now proceed to more formal negotiations with DOD top management on development of such a study.

8. Research by Other Federal Agencies on Herbicide Toxicity.

a. The Administrator has sent a letter to HEW urging them to undertake relevant epidemiological and other studies on the effects of herbicides on human health. A copy of this letter is attached.

b. We have been informed that NIOSH will sponsor an epidemiological follow-up study of the victims of the Nitro, W. Virginia industrial accidents. In addition, we have learned that DOD is planning to support a similar study in Soveso, Italy.

c. CDC apparently is initiating an epidemiological study of veterans' exposure to herbicides in Vietnam. We will attempt to obtain further data on this study.

d. Primate concern continues to be expressed on the paucity of primate studies on herbicide toxicity. The Committee will suggest through formal channels that HEW or other appropriate agencies undertake such studies.

9. Study on Dioxin Fat Levels.

a. The contract with Dr. Gross of the University of Nebraska for the analysis of dioxin levels in fat tissues has been approved. Dr. Gross will now begin accepting specimens from the VA study.

b. The first patient entered into the dioxin level study has undergone a fat biopsy at VAMC Hines.

c. Three individuals who were exposed to herbicides while serving in Operation Ranchhand will also be biopsied next week at VAMC Hines. Although not a part of the formal study, the determination of dioxin levels in their biopsy specimens will be of critical importance.

d. Efforts are continuing among the 5 participating VAMCs to identify additional individuals with appropriate herbicide exposure for inclusion in the study.

10. VA Advisory Committee on Herbicide Toxicity.

a. The official notice concerning the establishment of this Committee will be published in the Federal Register on April 5. According to law, the Committee may then be activated in 15 days after this (i.e., after April 20).

b. Nominations for membership on the Advisory Committee will be reviewed by the Steering Committee membership which will also have an opportunity to suggest members.

11. Meeting with Dr. Ton That Tung. A meeting between Dr. Tung, who is the Vietnamese physician claiming expertise on human herbicide toxicity, and the Steering Committee, has been tentatively set for 3:15 PM on May 9. Further details concerning this meeting will be developed as soon as the meeting date is finalized.

12. Compensation Claims for Herbicide Toxicity. The number of claims which have been filed with DVB remain stable at 414. Therefore, it appears that the intense initial activity with regard to the filing of herbicide claims has slackened.

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard A. Levinson

RICHARD A. LEVINSON, M.D.

Attachments

Appendix I

Appendix II

Administrator's Ltr.-HEW

Report of Contact

VACO STEERING COMMITTEE ON HERBICIDE TOXICITY

APPENDIX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE APRIL 3, 1979 MEETING

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>
Mr. Stratton Appleman	Director for News and Liaison Information Service (06)
Mr. Fred Blumenthal	Management Services (63)
Mr. Fred Conway	Attorney, General Counsel's Office (023D)
Paul A. L. Haber, M.D.	ACMD for Professional Service (11)
Lawrence Hobson, M.D.	Deputy ACMD for Research and Development
Donald Howell	Management Services (63)
William Jacoby, M.D.	Director, Medical Service (111)
Margaret Kilduff	Chief, Medical Records Staff (136D)
Lyndon E. Lee, M.D.	Surgical Service, VAMC Washington
Paul LeGolván, M.D.	Deputy Director, Pathology Service (113)
Richard A. Levinson, M.D.	Deputy ACMD for Professional Services (11F)
J. C. Peckarsky	Director, Compensation & Pension Service (21)
Gerrit Schepers, M.D.	Medical Service (111)

APPENDIX II

Summary of the Computer Printouts of Agent Orange Spraying Missions

1. On April 3, 1979, representatives from BVA, DM&S and DVB met in VA Central Office with Mr. Thomas Dashiell and Mr. John Eisele of the Department of Defense to discuss the VA's need for DOD data on herbicide use during the Vietnam War.

2. Mr. Dashiell opened the discussion by defining the data available in the computer printout of Vietnam herbicide spraying missions which he has recently provided to the VA. He pointed out that this data includes the following items on each mission: (1) date of the mission; (2) the agent utilized; (3) volume of herbicide sprayed; and (4) the geographic area involved in the spraying. This data is on a tape, which the VA can obtain, and it may be utilized in conjunction with a series of available computer programs. Among these programs for example is one which will printout areas sprayed with herbicides on a map of South Vietnam.

3. The VA was provided by Mr. Dashiell with a set of manuals, maps and other material which will make the data on the tape maximally useful.

4. The group was informed that each branch of the Armed Forces maintained a record of the location of their troops over time during the Vietnam War. Several of the VA participants expressed the opinion that correlating this data on troop locations with that of the spraying patterns, would provide the VA a basis for verifying whether veterans were exposed to herbicides in Vietnam. Since the historical data is probably not in a computer compatible form, it will be necessary for the VA to transform this data appropriately.

5. The final topic discussed was that of a potential VA-DOD epidemiological study of the Operation Ranchhand participants. The VA position in this matter is that the study of these individuals, many of whom had heavy exposure to herbicides during the Vietnam war, might help to resolve some of the issues on the human toxicity of herbicides. Accordingly, the VA is anxious to explore the feasibility of such a study with DOD. The discussion helped to clarify the source of many of the potential impediments to such a cooperative study.

6. The final item discussed was the specific steps that should be taken to advance cooperative efforts between VA and DOD in studying the issue of herbicide toxicity. Mr. Dashiell agreed to provide the VA with the tape on spraying patterns and related materials. He also agreed to help us identify the sources of historical data on troop movement and in contacting the DOD officials with authority to discuss a cooperative study of Operation Ranchhand personnel.