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Establishing a 1991 Veterans Research Network To Improve Characterization of Gulf War Illness and Provide a National Resource for Veterans and Investigators

Principal Investigator: STEELE, LEA

Institution Receiving Award: BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

Program: GWIRP

Proposal Number: GW110067

Funding Mechanism: Investigator-Initiated Research Award

Partnering Awards:

Award Amount: \$814,165.00

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Background: Despite considerable research on health issues affecting the nearly 700,000 U.S. Veterans of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, fundamental questions about the health consequences of Gulf War military service remain. There is still no widely accepted case definition for Gulf War illness (GWI), and little current information related to its characteristics or impact on the lives of Gulf War Veterans, nor has there ever been a comprehensive assessment to determine rates of more familiar diagnosed medical conditions in Gulf War Veterans. Research in this area has presented a number of challenges. Researchers commonly report enormous difficulty identifying adequate numbers of Gulf War-era Veterans for their studies. At the same time, Gulf War Veterans, many still looking for answers about unexplained health problems, have been willing and even anxious to participate in studies, but usually are unaware of research projects or how to participate. There is no unified national Veterans group or central contact point that can provide 1991 Gulf War-era Veterans with information relevant to military service of this period, alert them to recent developments, or solicit their participation in research studies.

Research Strategy: The proposed project is designed to address these prominent questions and problems related to the health of Gulf War Veterans with a coordinated, relatively straightforward, effort. Investigators at Baylor University will use a multifaceted, state-of-the-art survey research strategy to obtain current information on symptoms and medical conditions from a nationally representative sample of 1991 Gulf War-era Veterans. These data will be used to optimize a GWI case definition, based on current symptoms, and to provide important insights concerning rates of diagnosed medical conditions in Gulf War Veterans. Parallel to this effort, the project will establish a national research and information resource for Gulf War-era Veterans and for investigators. A broad sample of up to 45,000 Gulf War-era Veterans will be invited to complete health questionnaires by mail or online, and to participate in the 1991 Veterans Research and Information Network (91VetNet). Participating Veterans will receive current information on issues relevant to military service during 1990-1991 (e.g., available programs and benefits, recent developments related to health issues or research) and will be notified about studies for which they may be eligible. The network will also assist researchers who conduct studies of Gulf War-era Veterans by contacting network Veterans, on behalf of the investigator, to provide information about the study and how to participate.

Impact: The proposed project will have a direct impact on current understanding of the symptoms and characteristics of GWI and provide data to optimize a GWI case definition. It will also provide a current picture of diagnosed medical conditions, indicating whether specific conditions affect 1991 Gulf War Veterans at excess rates. Overall, the project will also have an important impact on the broader Gulf War research effort, by providing recruitment assistance to researchers for studies that assess GWI treatments and diagnostic tests and provide insights into its pathobiology. The project can also directly benefit individual Veterans, by providing current information relevant to

1991 military service.

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