

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans' Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards**

**Minutes of the Meeting
November 13-14, 2006**

Committee Members Present:

Mary V. StremLOW, Col, USMCR (Ret), Full Chair
Henry D. Royal, M.D., Scientific Chair
Theodore Colton, Sc.D.
Edward R. Epp, Ph.D.
Nancy L. Oleinick, Ph.D.
Mary Ann Stevenson, M.D. Ph.D.
George Hunt
Shannon Middleton

Committee Member Not Present:

Amir H. Soas, M.D.; Ph.D.

In Attendance from VA:

Bernice Green, VBA, Compensation and Pension Service, Acting Designated
Federal Officer
Ed Davenport, VBA, Compensation and Pension Service
Neil Otchin, M.D., VHA Public Health and Environmental Hazards Office

In Attendance from the Public

Owen Hoffman, National Institute for Occupational Health
Jeff Kotsch, Department of Labor
Brant Ulsh, National Institute for Occupational Safety Office of Compensation
Analysis and Support Nuclear Weapons Compensation Program

The meeting was held at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, Washington, DC 20420.

Ms. StremLOW called the meeting to order at 8:25 a.m., November 13, 2006. Ms. StremLOW welcomed all the committee members and visitors and later asked those in attendance to introduce themselves. Ms. StremLOW informed the committee that this would be her last meeting and wished the committee well in helping our veteran community.

The meeting was turned over to the scientific chairman, Dr. Royal. He continued to discuss administrative matters and addressed three issues:

- 1.) Correspondence received from Adm. Zimble, Veterans' Advisory Committee for Dose Reconstruction regarding adding skin and prostate cancers to the presumptive list. Dr. Royal recalled that in 2005, the

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- 2.) committee recommended adding prostate cancer to the VA presumptive list. Dr. Royal suggested that the committee look at the materials overnight for further discussion on next meeting day so that we can propose a letter to Adm. Zimble.
- 3.) His attendance of the National Association of Atomic Veterans meeting in St. Louis in September. He stated that the Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction was in attendance and there was a very unique interaction between the board and its stakeholders. They seem to have developed quite a bit of trust, and it was very good to see that. He suggested that maybe the Veterans' Advisory Board could teach this committee how to do that [build trust with our stakeholders].
- 4.) His attendance of the Veterans' Advisory Board meeting held in Hampton, Virginia. He discussed the purpose and duties of the VACEH, answered questions about the committee's activities. He stated that he learned that there is a difference between how we [VA] calculate probability of causation and how the National institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) does it.

Drs. Otchin, Epp, Hoffman and Ulsh continued discussion of item 3 above. It was explained that there are small subtle differences between the two, but there is a strong similarity between the two programs (VA/NIOSH).

Dr. Royal continued to preside over the scientific matters and continued to follow the agenda by calling on Dr. Otchin to present.

Dr. Otchin, a physician in the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards is responsible for providing medical opinions to assist in the adjudication of disability compensation claims due to exposure to radiation; also in other activities relating to radiation including the VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry examination program, the depleted uranium screening and surveillance programs, and emergency preparedness. He stated that the VA continues to use the NIOSH version of the Interactive Radioepidemiological Program computer software for most radiation opinions. In general, VA has followed NIOSH guidance as contained in its online User's Guide and technical documentation report with a few differences. He stated that his office has provided favorable medical opinions on 22 of the 162 radiation cases, or 14 percent for the period June 14, 2006 through October 13, 2006. Favorable opinions were provided on 20 of the 111 cases involving Atomic veterans, all for skin cancers. This represents a percentage of favorable medical opinions of 18 percent based on all 111 cases. In addition, favorable opinions were provided for two cases involving medical exposures to ionizing radiation.

A summary report was provided the Committee in response to a previous request regarding lung cancer using both the NIOSH version and the National Institute of Health version of IREP.

We continue to work with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) to make it easier for veterans to establish eligibility for Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR) examination and priority enrollment for VA health care. VA issued directives on September 5, 2006, entitled, "Verification of Ionizing Radiation Exposure," to clarify who may be eligible for the IRR examinations.

Dr. Otchin provided the Committee members with specific documents requested by Dr. Royal followed by a brief discussion. The floor was opened for questions pertaining to Dr. Otchin's presentation. Members of the Committee and guests participated in the discussion.

The Committee started review of BEIR VII and the presenters were as shown below. Throughout the reviews, there was open discussion from members of the Committee and guests.

- Mr. Hunt, Ms. StremLOW and Ms. Middleton with the Public Summary
- Dr. Epps and Dr. Oleinick covered chapter 1, Background Information.
 - Dr. Epps covered physical and chemical aspects of radiation and the interaction of radiation with the target molecule DNA.
 - Dr. Oleinick covered what the cell does in response to that damage [the physics and chemistry of how DNA is damaged].
- Dr. Oleinick covered chapter 2, the dose-response relationships for radiobiological effects for low LET radiation, and how the induction of various processes may or may not influence the dose response relationship.
- Dr. Stevenson presented on chapter 3, Radiation-Induced Cancer: Mechanisms, Quantitative Experimental Studies, and The Role of Genetic Factors.
- Dr. Soas covered chapter 4, Heritable Genetic Effects of Radiation in Human Populations. This chapter basically takes into account some of the natural-occurring mutations in somatic and germ cell contributing to cancer and heritable genetic diseases. Also, it covers a little bit of the effect of the mutagenic effect of X-rays, based on a study in fruit flies.

Dr. Royal opened the afternoon discussion with the letter from the Veterans Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR), Admiral Zimble asking whether or not we should add prostate cancer and skin cancer to the presumptive list. In 2005, we provided a letter to Daniel Cooper, Under Secretary for Benefits and recommended adding prostate cancer to the presumptive list. We also have some background information about why the VBDR is considering adding

prostate cancer and skin cancer to the presumptive list. Each member should read these materials overnight and Dr. Royal will draft letter to Admiral Zimble consistent with what we have said in the past two letters to Mr. Joe Thompson and Admiral Cooper for further discussion on tomorrow. Also, read Dr. Otchin's comments regarding the listing of actual cases with decisions for further discussion on tomorrow.

The meeting was opened to the public for comment.

- One guest [Dr. Hoffman] expressed interest in the summarization of various mechanisms of interaction of radiation and cellular and subcellular material, and how that potentially could be responsible for manifestation of disease. Is it possible to get an indication from your scientific view whether or not the small inflation of uncertainty in the DDREF is sufficient to represent what we would consider our current state of knowledge?
- Another guest [Mr. ULSH] expressed interest in why the committee is looking at BEIR VII and that the committee might also be interested in a report put out by the French Academy of Sciences in 2005.

A discussion of the above issues took place and the full committee participated in the discussion. Dr. Royal addressed the issue of why the committee is looking at BEIR VII. This committee has a very narrow scope and was mandated by Congress to advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs about changes in our scientific knowledge that would affect the disability compensation program.

The Committee continued review of BEIR VII and the presenters were as shown below.

- Dr. Colton covered chapter 5, Background for Epidemiologic Methods. This is a concise review of contemporary epidemiologic designs, methods and principles.
- Dr. Colton also covered chapter 6, Atomic Bomb Survivor Studies. Statistically significant associations were seen for the categories of heart disease, stroke, and diseases of the digestive, respiratory, and hematopoietic systems. The data were inadequate to distinguish between a linear dose response, a pure quadratic response, or a dose response with a threshold as high as 0.5 sievert. One of the strong points made throughout this chapter is that when you're at very low doses, it's hard to distinguish between whether it's a quadratic model, a curvilinear model, or a linear no-threshold regression model.
- Dr. Stevenson, covered chapter 7, Medical Radiation Studies.
- Dr. Royal covered chapter 8, occupational radiation exposures. BEIR VII's summary of these medical occupational exposures is that they're not a very good source of information about quantitative risk estimates because of the problems associated with them.
- Dr. Royal covered chapter 9, Environmental Radiation Studies.
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- Dr. Colton covered chapter 10, Integration of Biology and Epidemiology, and also discussed chapter 11, Risk Assessment, Models and Methods.
- Drs. Epp, Colton, Stevenson, and Soas covered chapter 12, Estimating Cancer Risk and all the subheadings.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:50 pm on November 13, 2006.

The meeting reconvened at 8:17 a.m. on November 14, 2006, with Dr. Royal opening the meeting. The first issue on the table was selecting a date and location for the next meeting. Since a date could not be decided, the committee would continue the discussion of the best date(s) to hold the next meeting. It was decided that the next meeting would be held in Washington, DC.

The committee continued review of the BEIR VII report.

- Drs. Oleinick, Soas, Colton, Stevenson, Royal covered chapter 13, Summary and Research Needs and all the subheadings.
- Drs. Oleinick, Colton, Royal and Soas covered the appendices A-D.

The committee completed the review of the BEIR VII report and throughout the review of the report there was continued discussions and comments from all members and guests.

- It was suggested that the committee extend an invite to the BEIR VII committee for someone (specifically, Richard Monson) to provide an overview [to address global issues] of the [BEIR VII] report and to join in the critique of the French report.
- Dr. Colton was tasked with contacting Richard Monson. [Dr. Colton is no longer a member of this committee.]

The next item of business was the draft response letter to Vice Admiral Zimble. The issues mentioned in his letter are:

- Adding basal cell melanomas and prostate cancer to the presumptive list, and
- The grant of service connection retroactively.

The committee will respond by saying that the most scientifically valid method for increasing the chances the Department of Veterans Affairs should compensate veterans whose cancers are likely caused by exposure and determined to be service connected is to use probability of causation. There is little scientific evidence to support the use of the presumptive list, however, if the VA must continue to use the presumptive list, the committee would recommend that all cancers be considered to be potentially radiogenic and be added to the presumptive list.

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To address the issue of granting service connection retroactively we will respond with, "The VACEH has no recommendation regarding whether service connection is granted retroactively. This decision is a policy decision and does not have a scientific basis, and therefore falls outside the charge of the committee.

Minor changes were made to the draft letter and the full committee agreed with the contents. Dr. Royal also emphasized the need to make sure that lines of communication are close and open between the VBDR and the VACEH.

The floor was opened for questions pertaining to Dr. Otchin's presentation regarding the listing of actual cases.

The rest of the morning was dedicated to reviewing the scientific publications as shown in the attachment to the Agenda. The floor was opened for questions and answers after each presentation.

The issue of where to send expense vouchers [in Ersie's absence] was raised and addressed. All vouchers are to be sent to the below address.

Department of Veterans Affairs
Compensation and Pension Service (211A)
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

The committee also raised the issue of whether or not they receive minutes from each meeting. The committee normally receives and approves the minutes from each meeting. If anyone would like to have a copy of minutes from any prior meeting, please contact Bernice Green or Ersie Farber.

This was also the last meeting for Dr. Colton and Ms. StremLOW. Dr. Colton was one of the original members and both were thanked for serving on this committee. A formal thank you notice will be to each of them.

A list of the papers reviewed, in the order of review, may be found in the attachment to these minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:45 pm.