

RAC Recommendations Regarding the Report of the Institute of Medicine (IOM), "Gulf War & Health, Volume 10: Update (2016)"

April 29, 2016

The RAC has serious concerns regarding several areas of recommendation of the IOM 2016 report, specifically:

- 1) the proposed abandonment of Gulf War animal research studies; and,*
- 2) the proposed abandonment of Gulf War epidemiological research studies.*

The RAC recommends rejecting these proposals.

BACKGROUND:

The IOM committee was tasked with reviewing, evaluating, and summarizing the available scientific and medical literature regarding health effects in Gulf War veterans, and with providing recommendations for future research on Gulf War veterans' health.

The RAC completely agrees with the IOM's 2016 recommendation that the "Top priority is the identification and development of effective therapeutic interventions and management strategies for Gulf War illness. VA should support research to determine how such treatments can be widely disseminated and implemented in all health care settings."

However, also included in the IOM's new recommendations were 1) and 2) noted above, which fly entirely in the face of these treatment-development recommendations and are of serious concern to the RAC. If accepted, these abandonment recommendations would threaten ongoing, currently funded VA (and other agency) research, and a critically important arm of future treatment-development Gulf War research.

Also included in the IOM's 2016 recommendations, again with which the RAC completely agrees, is that, "Sex-specific and race/ethnicity-specific health conditions should be determined and reported in future studies of Gulf War veterans," along with a reanalysis of existing data, "to assess for possible sex-specific and race/ethnicity-specific health conditions," if feasible.

Additionally, the IOM 2016 report identified the need to use new technologies in innovative studies, with which the RAC also concurs.

The RAC disagrees with the IOM 2016 report's recommendations ceasing circulatory, hematologic, respiratory, musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal, genitourinary, reproductive, and chronic skin conditions, and strongly encourages the continuation of this line of epidemiological research aimed at improving the health of Gulf War veterans. By contrast, the RAC concurs with the IOM 2016 report's recommendation to "conduct further assessments of cancer incidence, prevalence, and mortality."

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The RAC appreciates the IOM report's acknowledgement of Gulf War illness as the signature health concern of 1990-91 Gulf War veterans, and recommends VA do the same.
2. The RAC concurs with IOM recommendations encouraging enhanced investments in therapeutic studies and sex/ethnicity studies of GWI.
3. The RAC expresses concerns regarding IOM report recommendations related to modeling studies including animal and cell model systems, which remain important in understanding Gulf War illness pathobiology in order to develop effective treatments, and, it is hoped, preventions. The RAC strongly recommends VA continue investments in critically important preclinical Gulf War research, including animal models of Gulf War exposure.
4. The RAC endorses the use of new technologies in innovative studies, and recommends VA advance studies that try to better understand risk and mediators of persistence in GWI.
5. The RAC recommends VA continue to conduct epidemiological studies regarding the prevalence of Gulf War illness, and disease-specific morbidity and mortality in Gulf War veterans, including, circulatory, hematologic, respiratory, musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal, genitourinary, reproductive, and chronic skin conditions, and cancers.

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