

VA WAR-RELATED ILLNESS AND INJURY STUDY CENTERS (WRIISC)

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE.** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides information to clinicians for referring combat veterans from past and future conflicts, with difficult-to-diagnose, debilitating illnesses to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISC).
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS.** This new VHA Handbook provides the mission of the WRIISCs, eligibility, and procedural requirements.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES.** VHA Directive 1303.
- 4. RECISSIONS.** None.
- 5. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE.** The Office of Environmental Agents (131) is responsible for the contents of this Handbook. Questions may be referred to 202-273-8463.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION.** This VHA Handbook is scheduled for re-certification on or before the last working day of July 2009.

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WAR-RELATED ILLNESS AND INJURY STUDY CENTERS (WRIISCs)

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides information to clinicians for referring combat veterans from past and future conflicts, with difficult-to-diagnose, debilitating illnesses to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)'s War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISC).

2. BACKGROUND

a. Public Law 105-368 directed VA to contract with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to develop a plan for establishing national centers for the study of war-related illnesses and post-deployment issues.

b. On November 5, 1999, NAS recommended that VA establish centers for the study of war-related illnesses similar in structure to VA's Geriatric Research Education, and Clinical Centers. NAS came to the conclusion that applying a proven model of care, research, and education to the issue of deployment health "should contribute greatly to the advancement of knowledge in this area."

c. On May 10, 2001, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs announced the establishment of two War-Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISCs) at VA medical centers in Washington, DC, and East Orange, NJ. Additional Centers may be added in the future. For further information on WRIISCs, please refer to the following website:
<http://www1.va.gov/environagents/docs/WRBrochureFinalProof.pdf>.

NOTE: WRIISCs were initially named Centers for the Study of War Related Illnesses (CSWRIs).

d. These centers collaborate with the Department of Defense (DOD) personnel and other health care professionals engaged in similar post-deployment health issues for active duty service members and veterans.

e. In addition to specialty clinical care for combat veterans with difficult-to-diagnose disabling illnesses, the two WRIISCs are charged with developing new research for new treatments for such patients; education for patients and VA health care providers who work with these patients; and risk communication on war-related illnesses for patients and their families.

NOTE: These Centers have replaced the Gulf War Referral Centers expanding their mission to offer similar comprehensive clinical care to combat veterans of all eras, plus performing the other functions described in paragraph 2.

3. MISSION

The mission of WRIISCs is to provide health-related services to veterans who served in a theater of combat operations, or in combat support, during a past, current, or future conflict, and who, subsequent to such service, have suffered, are suffering, or suffer from difficult-to-diagnose

disabling illnesses. Such services include: clinical care, risk communication, education, research addressing potential environmental exposures and experiences, and adverse health outcomes.

4. AUTHORITY

No special treatment authority applies to care provided through the WRIISCs. Care is to be provided to enrolled combat veterans under VA's general treatment authority. This means that veterans in a co-payment required status, either for medical care or for medications, may be subject to co-payment unless a separate eligibility factor exempts them from such co-payment requirements.

5. ELIGIBILITY AND REFERRAL PROCEDURES

a. As part of the WRIISC evaluation process, veterans must first have a thorough examination by their VA primary care clinician. The WRIISC serves as a second opinion for veterans with war-related concerns. Eligibility criteria are:

(1) Veterans must have served in an area of combat. To determine whether a veteran has served in combat for purposes of the WRIISC Program, VA relies upon the same citations and criteria used to determine a veteran's eligibility for readjustment counseling at VA Vet Centers as authorized by Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 1712A (see App.A); and the criteria set forth in current VHA policy.

(2) Veterans must have an undiagnosed or difficult to diagnose illness and/or disabling unexplained symptoms.

(3) Veterans must be medically and psychiatrically stable for participation and evaluation at the WRIISC since these are fairly intense 4 to 5 day programs. Also, the WRIISC staff must make a determination that the veteran is likely to benefit from such an evaluation. **NOTE:** *Seriously ill patients with well-established diagnoses, even if they are not responding to recommended therapy, usually are not appropriate candidates for WRIISC referral.*

b. The referring facility assumes the responsibility for arranging and paying for travel to the WRIISC. Each WRIISC, in turn, assumes the responsibility of arranging and paying for the return travel of the veteran.

c. The veteran's VA primary care clinician is responsible for the referral. **NOTE:** *Veterans cannot self-refer to WRIISCs or be referred by a non-VA provider.*

d. An electronic WRIISC Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) template must be completed by the primary care provider. A national template was developed for WRIISC and distributed in patch TIU*1.0*159. The title is WRIISC ASSESSMENT.

NOTE: *Once completed, advise the Senior Environmental Health Coordinator, VA Central Office, who will designate one of the WRIISCs for possible referral (see App. C).*

e. VA Form 10-0417, Pre-screening Application for WRIISC Referral, must be completed and sent to the Office of Environmental Agents (131), either by fax (202) 273-9080, or e-mail.
NOTE: A copy of VA Form 10-0417 is found in Appendix B.

6. REFERENCES

- a. Information Bulletin 10-165.
- b. Slide presentation “War-Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISCs)” at website:
<http://www1.va.gov/environagents/docs/WRBrochureFinalProof.pdf>.

**CRITERIA USED TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY AS COMBAT VETERANS FOR
WAR RELATED ILLNESS AND INJURY STUDY CENTERS**

1. To determine veterans' eligibility as a combat veteran, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) relies on the same citation and criterion used to determine eligibility for readjustment counseling at VA Vet Centers, as authorized by Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 1712A, and current VHA policy. According to present VHA policy, a positive determination in any of the following criteria indicates eligibility as a combat veteran:

a. Any veteran who served in a theater of combat operations during World War II and is eligible for one or more of the following three campaign medals:

(1) The European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; it was awarded for theater military service to include combat operations during the period December 7, 1941, through November 8, 1945.

(2) The Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; it was awarded for theater military service to include combat operations during the period December 7, 1941, through March 2, 1946.

(3) The American Campaign Medal; it was awarded for theater military service to include combat operations during the period December 7, 1941, through March 2, 1946.

b. Any veteran who served in the theater of combat operations in Korea during the Korean War, and is eligible for the Korean Service Medal; it was awarded for theater military service to include combat operations during the period June 27, 1950, through July 27, 1954.

c. Any veteran who served in the theater of combat operations in Vietnam during the Vietnam era (July 3, 1965 through May 7, 1975) and who received the Vietnam Service Medal for such service or Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for specific operations in 1975.

d. Any veteran who served in the Lebanon theater of operations (August 25, 1982, through February 26, 1984) and who received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

e. Any veteran who served in the Grenada theater of operations (October 23, 1983, through November 21, 1983) and who received an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

f. Any veteran who served in the Panama theater of operations (December 20, 1989, through January 31, 1990) and who received an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

g. Any veteran who served in the theater of combat operations in the Gulf War (August 2, 1990, and continuing until ended by Presidential proclamation or law), and who received a Southwest Asian Campaign Medal for such service.

h. Any veteran who served in the Somalia theater of operations (September 17, 1992, and ending by Presidential proclamation or law) and who received an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for such service.

2. Veterans who served in the peace-keeping operations in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, including Bosnia and Kosovo, who were awarded an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for one or more of the following three operations: Operation Joint Endeavor; Operation Point Guard, or Operation Joint Forge. Services for combat veterans under this policy are authorized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the VA Memorandum "Eligibility for Veteran Returnees from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia," dated April 26, 2000.

3. Requests for medical services that do not meet these eligibility requirements may still qualify for such services if the veteran's DD-214, Discharge Papers, shows an award of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in some other conflict or period of armed hostility not included in the preceding list. Service members, Reservists, and members of the National Guard who were activated to a combat mission who subsequently separate from active duty should each receive a DD-214, which may indicate receipt of such an award.

4. National Guard and Reserve personnel who were activated and served in a theater of combat or in combat against a hostile force may also be eligible. National Guard and Reserve personnel are eligible for VA health care if they were ordered to active duty by a Federal declaration and released or discharged from active duty under other than dishonorable conditions. In addition, National Guard or Reserve personnel must have served either 24 months of continuous active duty, or the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty, whichever is shorter.

5. For further information relating to determining combat status of veterans who served in combat during a period of war after the Gulf War, or against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998, refer to current VHA policy.

***NOTE:** These criteria are not necessarily used for determining eligibility for the provision of health care services under 38 U.S.C. 1710(e)(1)(D), which covers certain combat veterans.*



Please fax the completed form to the Senior Environmental Health Coordinator at (202) 273-9080.

Questions may be directed to Veterans Affairs Central Office (VACO) (202-273-8463) or WRIISC administrative contacts in Washington, DC (800-722-8340) and East Orange, NJ (800-248-8005).

VAMC ADDRESS

VETERAN NAME

VETERAN HOME ADDRESS

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

TELEPHONE NUMBER

FAX NUMBER

PRIMARY CARE CLINICIAN NAME

TELEPHONE NUMBER

FAX NUMBER

NOTE: Refer to Appendix A for the following questions.

COMBAT VETERAN?

YES NO (IF NO, VETERAN IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE WRIISC PROGRAM)

SERVICE DATES

FROM:

TO:

IF YES, WHICH COMBAT?

DOES VETERAN HAVE UNDIAGNOSED, DEBILITATING SYMPTOMS/ILLNESSES?

YES NO (IF NO, VETERAN IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE WRIISC PROGRAM)

IF YES, PLEASE PROVIDE A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SYMPTOMS/ILLNESSES:

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT STAFF NAME

TELEPHONE NUMBER

FAX NUMBER

**SAMPLE OF THE PATIENT ASSESSMENT INFORMATION FOR POSSIBLE REFERRAL
TO WRIISC FOUND IN THE COMPUTERIZED PATIENT RECORD SYSTEM (CPRS)**

NOTE: War-Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISCs).

- 1. Date of exam.**
- 2. Reason for referral.**
- 3. List all medically unexplained war-related symptoms.**
- 4. Is the veteran medically stable for travel? Yes or No**

5. Demographics

- a. Name,
- b. Social Security Number (SSN),
- c. Date of Birth (DOB),
- d. Address,
- e. Phone number,
- f. Race,
- g. Sex,
- h. Marital status,
- i. Referring physician,
- j. Address of referring physician, and
- k. Phone number of referring physician.

6. Military Information

- a. Military service in combat area. Yes or No
- b. Dates of deployable military service.
- c. Military occupational specialty.

d. Military unit in which veteran served.

e. Prisoner of War (POW) status. Yes or No

7. Medical Information

a. Allergies.

b. Active medications.

c. Problem list.

d. Social history (include occupational history, tobacco and alcohol use, substance abuse, social living situation).

8. Military Exposure Information

a. Have you had exposure to the following: Yes or No

(1) Smoke from burning oil wells.

(2) Diesel, kerosene, and/or other petrochemical fumes.

(3) Fuels.

(4) Paints or other petrochemical substances.

(5) Depleted uranium.

(6) Radiation.

(7) Pesticides.

(8) Nerve gas.

(9) Mustard gas.

(10) Contaminated food.

(11) Contaminated water.

(12) Ammunition or missile explosion within a 1 mile radius of locale.

(13) Biological agents.

(14) Harsh living conditions.

(15) Insect bites.

b. Have you: **Yes or No**

(1) Had contact with a POW(s).

(2) Had contact with dead animals.

(3) Worn chemical protective gear and/or heard chemical alarms.

(4) Witnessed death.

(5) Experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment.

(6) Had vaccines or other preventative measures:

(a) Anthrax,

(b) Small pox,

(c) Yellow fever,

(d) Botulism,

(e) Hepatitis A,

(f) Hepatitis B,

(g) Rabies,

(h) Malaria pills,

(i) Pyridostigmine pills (NAPP), and

(j) Other. _____

(7) Other Exposures. _____

9. Medical Review of Systems

a. General;

- b. Skin;
- c. Head, ears, eyes, nose, and/or throat;
- d. Respiratory;
- e. Cardiovascular;
- f. Gastrointestinal;
- g. Genitourinary;
- h. Musculoskeletal;
- i. Hematological;
- j. Peripheral vascular; and
- k. Neurological.

10. Psychiatric

- a. Is veteran experiencing symptoms of active suicidal ideation? Yes or No
- b. Is veteran acutely mentally ill? Yes or No
- c. Comments

11. Physical Exam Findings

- a. Vitals;
- b. Weight;
- c. Height;
- d. General appearance;
- e. Skin;
- f. Head, ears, eyes, nose, and throat;
- g. Lungs;
- h. Cardiovascular;

- i. Abdomen;
- j. Genitalia;
- k. Rectal;
- l. Extremities;
- m. Neurologic; and
- n. Psychiatric.

12. Laboratory Information. Download:

- a. Complete Blood Count (CBC);
- b. Multiple Chemistry Screening Tests (Chem 7);
- c. Liver function tests (Lfts);
- d. Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (Tsh);
- e. Venereal disease Research laboratory (Vdrl), i.e., Syphilis test;
- f. Occult blood,
- g. Vitamin B (B-12);
- h. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV);
- i. Hepatitis panel;
- j. Erythrocyte sedimentation rate (Esr); and
- k. Urinalysis.

13. Diagnostic Information. Download:

- a. Recent X-rays,
- b. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI),
- c. Computed Tomography (CT) scan,
- d. Electrocardiogram (EKG),

- e. Electronmyogram (EMG), and
- f. Sleep studies.

14. Consults.

15. Assessment.

16. Plan.