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SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL FOR A STUDY OF FEMALE VIETNAM VETERANS

Background

Despite the understandable concerns of female Vietnam veterans, women could not be included in the original Agent Orange studies for several reasons. Most importantly, if women had been eligible for these studies in proportion to their representation in Vietnam, only a token number would have been included (about 10 to 15 in the Vietnam Experience component of the study), far too few to assess their health status with any reliability. Moreover, at the time the original protocols were developed, there appeared to be three formidable operational obstacles to inclusion of female veterans. First, because gender was not recorded on any comprehensive listing of Vietnam-era Army veterans, identification of women who had served in Vietnam was thought to be problematic. Second, there were uncertainties concerning the existence of an appropriate group to which the health of female Vietnam veterans could be compared. In particular, CDC was concerned that virtually all members of certain groups of female military personnel, such as Army nursing officers, may have had a tour of duty in Vietnam sometime during their service. If this were the case, identification of a comparison group for female Vietnam veterans would be problematic. Third, location of women 10 to 15 years after completion of their military service was thought to be difficult, particularly since many of these women would have changed their names as a result of marriage or divorce.

Women other than those serving in the military also were in Vietnam during this era. They were principally from the American Red Cross, other service organizations, and the Agency for International Development. We have been unable to define precisely that population as well.

~~As a result of several feasibility tests, CDC now believes that none of these potential obstacles will prevent the successful implementation of a study of women veterans and therefore proposes a study of the health of women who served in the military in Vietnam.~~

We propose to study only the women who served in the military and to exclude nonmilitary women at this time, since the identification of all who served appears not to be possible. It is therefore not possible in the nonmilitary women to develop an appropriate study group and control group.

Proposal

CDC is proposing an epidemiologic study comparing the health of approximately 7,000 female veterans who served in Vietnam to that of a sample of 11,000 female Vietnam era veterans who were not assigned to Vietnam. The study will closely parallel the methods of the Vietnam Experience component of the study of male veterans which CDC is presently conducting. The group of female veterans who did not serve in Vietnam will be chosen to resemble closely that

of the group who served in Vietnam with regard to age, race, military occupational speciality, and branch of service. Health assessment of women participating in the study will include vital status and cause of death determination, a detailed health and exposure interview, and, on a sample of 4,000 participants (2,000 from each group), a thorough physical examination and laboratory testing. The study will focus on health outcomes of particular concern to women, such as, but not limited to, reproductive problems, in addition to issues addressed in the study of male veterans. The study size should provide the same statistical power of detecting differences as that in the Vietnam experience study among males.

Resources

The proposed study will run for 5 years and will cost an estimated \$33 million. Of this amount, \$26 million will be for contract work and \$7 million (or \$1.4 million per year for 5 years) will be for in-house costs. The proposed study will involve 16 FTE's per year.

Legislation

Since the proposal involves only veterans, that is, women who served in the military, we do not believe additional legislative authority is needed. We would recommend, however, that the Veterans Administration and CDC request the Senate and House Veterans Committees to indicate whether or not they want us to proceed with this study. If so, we can do the study only if provided the necessary resources.

6/20/84