



Projecting Future Operations of the Veterans' Advisory Board: *Suggestions to Consider*

**John Lathrop, Ph.D.
Board Member,
editing the four subcommittee reports**

Arlington, VA
March 4, 2010

Strategic Overview: History

- **To date, Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR) has made 55 recommendations to:**
 - **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**
 - **Nuclear Test Personnel Review Program (NTPR), DoD**
- **VA and NTPR responses to those recommendations have resulted in many benefits to the Atomic Veteran**

The Two Most Important Benefits: First

NTPR instituted triage-like expedited processing:

- maintains benefit of doubt to veteran**
- allocates most claims into standardized processes**
- reduces the need for individual dose reconstructions**

Results:

- Backlog of claims reduced
from about 1,600 to about 100**
- Average NTPR processing time reduced
from about 2 years to about 2 months**
- Maximum NTPR processing time reduced
from about 4 years to about 6 months**

The Two Most Important Benefits: Second

**VA consolidated all Atomic Veterans claims in one
Regional Office: Jackson, Mississippi**

Results:

- **Improved expertise applied to claims**
- **Improved standardization of processing**

Strategic Overview: A Suggested Future

Strategic Shift:

- Now that the recommendation – response process has run its course and resulted in its benefits,
- we here propose:
- it's time for VBDR to shift from advising change
- to monitoring and enhancing ongoing operations:

Strategic Overview: A Suggested Future

Monitor & Enhance

Ongoing Operations: Six Tasks:

- 1. Continue current audits and oversight, on a limited basis, primarily quality assurance oversight**
- 2. Institute Quality Management systems**
- 3. Maintain those QM systems**
- 4. Outreach to inform the veteran of the program**
- 5. Improve communication during the claim process**
- 6. Generate demographic projections of the population of Atomic Veterans, and likely claims rates over time, use those to advise outreach & claims management**

Task 1: Continue Current Audits and Oversight

Subcommittee 1: Continue NTPR audits & oversight

- **Scale back audits to random checks of checkers (particularly expedited cases)**
- **Review of double-blind analyses & associated lessons learned**
- **Reviews of new or changes in methodology, SOPs, and technical basis documents**
- **Oversight of Quality Management re NTPR, in concert with Subcommittee 3**

Subcommittee 2: Continue VA audits & oversight

Task 2: Institute Quality Management Systems: NTPR

Subcommittee 3: Working with NTPR, conferring w SC1

- **NTPR has developed an extensive set of QA documents for handling Atomic Veterans claims**
- **SC3 will continue to review and provide advice on NTPR's QA system:**
 - **Quarterly Quality metrics that include**
 - Corrective Action tracking and resolution**
 - Scoreboard concept**
 - **Decision Summary Sheets**

Task 2: Institute Quality Management Systems: VA

Subcommittee 3: Working with VA, conferring w SC2

- **Seek VA QM documents at Jackson analogous to NTPR QQMs and DSSs**
- **Those QQMs & DSSs would be solely at Jackson, and framed as low-effort elements of best management practices**
- **Goals of those QQMs & DSSs:**
 - “Beginning – to – End” QM tracking Atomic Veteran claims as they circulate between VA & NTPR**
- **SC3 is not far enough along in this process to predict its success and extent**

Task 3: Maintain NTPR & VA QM Systems

Subcommittee 3: Working with NTPR & VA, conferring w SC2 & SC3

- **Once the QM systems are developed, they need to be monitored for the life of the program**
- **A key point of the QQMs and DSSs is that they should allow outside oversight, i.e. by SC1, SC2 & SC3, or any other monitoring agency, with minimal effort**
- **... while at the same time, the QQMs and DSSs should provide internal management oversight benefits within NTPR and VA**

Task 4: Outreach to inform the veteran of the program

Subcommittee 4, with the cooperation of SC 2

- **Advise NTPR & VA in developing & managing a consolidated Atomic Veterans Outreach Campaign**
- **Do everything feasible to bring the Radiation Dose Reconstruction Program to the attention of as many Atomic Veterans and survivors as possible, so they can make an informed choice whether or not to file a claim**
- **Maintain that operation for the duration of the program**

Task 5: Improve Communication During Claim

Subcommittee 4

- **SC4 will review current correspondence templates between each agency and Atomic Veterans for possible improvement**
- **The Goal: Each claiming Atomic Veteran should be given a clear idea of the process and progress of his claim**
- **... so he can make his best case**
- **... so he can make fully informed decisions regarding his claim**
- **... so he fully understands the final decision**

Task 6: Demographic Projection

Subcommittee 4

- **SC4 will generate a demographic projection of the Atomic Veteran population over the next decades**
- **and the likely claims rates over that time**
- **then use those to advise outreach and claims management**

Recapping: Strategic Overview: Six Suggested Future Tasks of the Board

Monitoring & Enhancing Ongoing Operations:

- 1. Continue current audits and oversight, on a limited basis, primarily quality assurance oversight**
- 2. Institute Quality Management systems**
- 3. Maintain those QM systems**
- 4. Outreach to inform the veteran of the program**
- 5. Improve communication during the claim process**
- 6. Generate demographic projections of the population of Atomic Veterans, and likely claims rates over time, use those to advise outreach & claims management**

Discussion

- **The general concept of shifting from recommendation/response to monitoring/enhancing ongoing operations**
- **Operational Realities of the Six Tasks:**
 1. **Continue current audits and oversight, limited, QA**
 2. **Institute Quality Management systems**
 3. **Maintain those QM systems**
 4. **Outreach to inform the veteran of the program**
 5. **Improve communication during the claim process**
 6. **Generate demographic projections to advise**
- **Decisions we can reach today**
- **Next Steps**