



THE UNDER SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR BENEFITS  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

JUN 1 2007

James A. Zimble, M.D., VADM (Retired)  
Chairman, Veterans' Advisory Board  
on Dose Reconstruction  
7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 400  
Bethesda, MD 20814-3095

Dear Admiral Zimble:

Thank you for the recommendations of the Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR). I am responding to each recommendation directed to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

**Recommendation 1:** That the VA provide the outcome of claims to the Nuclear Test Personnel Review (NTPR). The availability of such data offers essential feedback for the enhancement of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA's) methodology.

**Response:** The Veterans Health Administration's Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards has provided the NTPR with summaries of medical opinions. These summaries list the outcomes for all medical opinions prepared by the Environmental Hazards Staff addressing the issue of causation for individual disabilities.

**Recommendation 2:** That the VA provide the Board with data on the current population of atomic veterans who have made non-presumptive claims after an RDA is supplied.

**Response:** VA has already provided the Board (through Dr. John Lathrop) with summaries listing the outcomes for all medical opinions prepared by the Environmental Hazards Staff addressing the issue of causation for individual disabilities. VA is only able to categorize the grant or denial of radiation claims under 38 CFR § 3.311.

**Recommendation 3:** That for non-radiogenic medical conditions, DTRA and VA agree on a process through which a decision would be made on whether a case requires a dose reconstruction, and report back to the Board on the process.

**Response:** VA will seek a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel concerning VA's obligation to seek radiation doses from DTRA for claims involving non-radiogenic disabilities. Following receipt of the opinion, VA will address this issue with DTRA.

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**Recommendation 4:** That following VA Compensation and Pension Service visit to Jackson Regional Office in April 2007, and the quality review by VA STAR (Systematic Technical Accuracy Review) staff in September 2007, VA provide VBDR with a status report of performance with respect to STAR metrics and cycle time for atomic veterans claims.

**Response:** In fiscal year (FY) 2006, the VA STAR staff found errors in seven of the forty-one radiation claims reviewed for quality. To date in FY 2007, eight cases have been reviewed with no errors found. The FY 2007 reviews comprised two cases from the Jackson Regional Office and six from other regional offices. Among other metrics, the reviews addressed whether

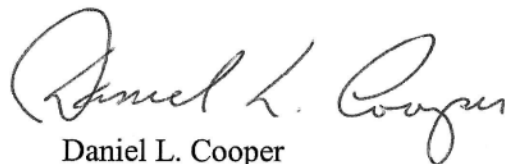
- the referral to DTRA for a radiation dose, if needed, was complete, and
- the decision granting or denying benefits was correct.

Finally, as part of individual performance reviews, local management at the Jackson Regional Office is required to conduct quality reviews of the work performed by individuals assigned to the radiation work group.

VA will brief the Board when the results of the September STAR quality review are finalized.

Thank you for VBDR's efforts to improve VA's compensation program for atomic veterans.

Sincerely yours,



Daniel L. Cooper