

# **VETERANS' ADVISORY BOARD ON DOSE RECONSTRUCTION**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of its audits and assessments of Nuclear Test Personnel Review (NTPR) Program radiation dose assessments (RDAs), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claim procedures, and other meetings and interactions with both DTRA and VA, the Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR) offered a number of recommendations at the March 4, 2010 meeting held in Arlington, Virginia. The Board believes that these recommendations, if implemented, would improve the VA compensation program for atomic veterans.

### **For the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA):**

The VBDR had no specific recommendations for DTRA alone.

### **For the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):**

First, the VBDR would like to acknowledge the positive improvements that have taken place at the Jackson Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO). During a recent preparatory meeting, the VBDR members were encouraged by the local VARO staff and their proactive interactions to facilitate Atomic Veterans' claims.

**Recommendation 1:** Refresher training should be provided to all the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Offices (VAROs) regarding the need to expedite the radiation claims to Jackson VARO. The training should emphasize that minimum claim development (diagnosis of the disease and the consolidation letter sent to the veteran) should take place at the originating VAROs, as directed in MR-21 part B and C and from the updated 2007 Fast letter.

**Recommendation 2:** Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) should update the 06-20 Fast letter to reflect the current method for processing of claims and to include information about handling fire related Service Treatment Records (STRs).

**Recommendation 3:** Additional staff should be procured to assist claims processing at the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, Veterans Health Administration Central Office.

**Recommendation 4:** The current staff should be maintained and additional staff hired for the Jackson VARO Radiation Team.

**Recommendation 5:** VA should expedite the development and implementation of an electronic automated claims processing system.

**Recommendation 6:** The VA should develop one or more standard operating procedures specifying the rendering of medical opinions regarding Atomic Veterans claims. This recommendation is made with acknowledgement of the VA staffing changes that have occurred since the Board made a similar recommendation (Recommendation #4) in April 2008. The VBDR Subcommittee 3 (Quality Management) would welcome the opportunity to review the SOPs for the VA and provide feedback as warranted.

**Recommendation 7:** The VA should send an outreach letter, similar to the letter sent in June 2009 to the greater-than-five rem dose cohort, targeted to the 1 to 5 rem dose cohort. VBDR Subcommittee 4 (Communications and Outreach) would appreciate the opportunity to work with the VA on the actual contents of this letter and how the mechanics of the mailing(s) would be accomplished.

**For the VA and DTRA:**

**Recommendation 1:** VA should work with DTRA to develop a screening process for sub capsular cataracts, similar to skin cancer processing, to allow Jackson to process these claims locally without referral to VHA.