

POLICY & PRACTICE

Gulf War Research

New federally funded research will test the hypothesis that veterans with Gulf War Illness have metabolic, structural, or functional changes in their basal ganglia that are not accounted for by posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, or alcoholism. This is among 24 projects that were funded by the federal government starting in fiscal year 2005 to examine the brain and nervous system function, environmental toxicology, immune function, and general health of veterans of the Gulf War. The Department of Veterans Affairs is required to report to

Congress each year on the status of research into the health consequences of military service in the Persian Gulf region from Aug. 2, 1990, to July 31, 1991, said William Goldberg, Ph.D., portfolio manager of the VA's Office of Biomedical Research and Development Service. From fiscal year 1992 through 2005, the federal government has sponsored 300 research projects on Gulf War veterans' illnesses, according to the report. These annual reports are available at www.research.va.gov/resources/pubs/pubs_individual.cfm?Category=Gulf%20War%20Reports.

Moratorium on Imaging Pay Cuts

With Medicare due to slash payments for imaging services by 35%-55% in January 2007, provider organizations are rallying to delay or repeal the cuts, which call for payments for the technical component—equipment, supplies, and overhead for imaging services—to be reimbursed at the hospital outpatient payment rate if it is lower than the physician fee schedule. At a hearing of the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee, Democrats and Republicans said they were concerned the reductions were enacted without public input and without any assessment of the impact on beneficiaries. The cuts were

inserted into the Deficit Reduction Act during a House-Senate conference; the act was signed in February 2006. "We don't know exactly what we've done, or how well or how poorly we've done it," said Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) at the hearing. H.R. 5704, sponsored by Rep. Joseph Pitts (R-Penn.), would institute a 2-year moratorium. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-N.Y.) has introduced a bill that would repeal the cuts (H.R. 5238). Michael Amery, legislative counsel for the American Academy of Neurology, said that while the academy would like to see the cuts overturned, "our first priority continues to be reimbursement under the [Medicare] Sustainable Growth Rate formula." If the imaging cuts were overturned, the academy is concerned that a physician fee reduction might be considered again in order to make things budget neutral, Mr. Amery said.

Alzheimer's Research Funding

The Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative—a 5-year study looking at imaging technology to improve early diagnosis and gauge the effectiveness of treatments—got a \$2.1 million boost last month from the Alzheimer's Association. Officials at the association had previously granted \$1 million to help fund this \$60 million public-private initiative launched by the National Institute on Aging in 2004. The project is aimed at testing whether serial magnetic resonance imaging, positron emission tomography, biologic markers, and clinical and neuropsychological assessments can be used together to measure the progression of mild Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment. Researchers also will evaluate the use of PET scans with Pittsburgh Compound B (PIB). "PET/PIB technology will be a valuable addition to the study," Dr. Samuel Gandy, chair of the Alzheimer's Association's Medical and Scientific Advisory Council, said in a statement. Researchers are currently recruiting patients for the study. Information on the study is available at www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/ResearchInformation/ClinicalTrials/ADNI.htm.

Poll: Pay for Unhealthy Choices?

More than half of respondents to a Wall Street Journal/Harris Interactive poll say that people who smoke or choose not to wear seat belts should pay a higher health insurance premium than others, but most people did not feel the same way about individuals who were overweight or sedentary. Only 27% of the poll's 2,200 respondents thought that overweight people should pay more for insurance than slimmer peers; the same percentage favored having sedentary people pay more. The poll had a 3.3% margin of error.

—Joyce Frieden

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Eli Lilly and Company	
Cymbalta	3-4
Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation	
Focalin	14a-14b, 15
Pfizer Inc.	
Rebif	19-20
UCB Pharma, Inc.	
Keppra	7-8
Corporate	13

Before the research
is published...

Before the drug
is approved...

Before the guideline
is issued...

You read it first in



Clinical Neurology News

— We Write Medicine's First Draft —

www.clinicalneurologynews.com

