



Bladder Cancer and the Brave: Questions and Answers

Stephanie C.: Thank you so much, both Dr. Mossanen and Dr. Clapp. This was very interesting content, and I think it's very relevant. There was a question that did come in. Do you know of any other studies that are being done on Desert Storm veterans exposed to burning oil fields and bladder cancer? Not just to the burn pits, but do you know if there's anything that's been done in that area?

Dr. Clapp: Yeah, the Gulf War, which the first Gulf War was in 1991, and there's been a tremendous amount. There was oil wells that were set on fire at the end of that and people were exposed, and there have been some studies done. I'm sure that the literature on that is voluminous at this stage. There were national committees set up to consolidate what was known and what could be understood from the various studies of Gulf War veterans. That commission was disbanded recently, I think in the last three or four years, but their reports are available. I don't have that handy, but if you go to the VA and look at the Gulf War illness websites or link to those parts of the VA that talk about Gulf War illness, you'll see a lot of evidence that's been compiled that's available there.

Stephanie C.: Great. Another question. Has any interaction between solvent Agent Orange exposure and smoking in bladder cancer risk been observed? For instance, I guess are you more at risk from exposure to solvents and Agent Orange if you were also a smoker? Do you know that, either of you?

Dr. Mossanen: I don't know that that's been able to be teased out, but I do know that when a lot of these retrospective papers that go back in the past and look at veterans that were exposed to Agent Orange and they're trying to figure out of that Agent Orange exposure is the reason why they got bladder cancer a lot of those veterans were smokers at the time, which is, as we all know, a big risk factor for bladder cancer. If anything, they tend to overlap and make the picture a little bit more complicated, but I don't know specifically the answer to that question.

Stephanie C.: Any studies done or contemplated to compare Vietnam veterans with non-Vietnam service vets? Maybe mirror the Camp Pendleton versus Camp Lejeune, since that study was so foundational to the presumptive decision. Has there been any work that you might know about that compares current veterans with veterans that might have been exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam?

Dr. Clapp: Yeah, I can speak to that. I actually did my doctoral dissertation on exactly that, comparing cancer in Vietnam veterans to cancer in other veterans that didn't go to Vietnam but were in the service at the same time. The dissertation was finished in 1987, and so it only includes that comparison up until that time period but we did find an excess, in particular, of soft tissue sarcoma in the Vietnam veterans compared to the other veterans that were in the military that didn't go to Vietnam. I testified about that in the US Congress actually, in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and then the Agent Orange Act, which was passed in 1991, included soft tissue sarcoma as one of the initial compensated cancers or diseases. There are two cancers and something called chloracne that were in the original legislation, and that was that type of comparison. I'm not aware of it being done more recently, up until the present. Might be worth doing, at least up until the late '80s. That was, at least, one example of what the question asked about.

Stephanie C.: Thank you. Well, I really appreciate that you did the parallel to show how the exposures that we've seen in 9/11 are so similar to the exposures that our military veterans have been subjected to in their occupations. There's another question. Since bladder cancer can take 40 years to show up, isn't it time to look again at Vietnam vets versus non-Vietnam vets? I guess maybe doing a follow-up to your dissertation. Would this be an interesting paper? Although, you have to look at, I guess, all of the exposures that veterans in modern warfare are now exposed to and how does that compare. It would be very interesting to take a look at that, I suppose. This was suggested by one of our participants.

Dr. Clapp: I think it's a good idea. I think I said it needs to be updated. I'm now retired so I'm not going to do it, but I hope that there is some younger researcher somewhere that would do that. It's possible to get the information and even collect information about, as you said, Stephanie, other exposures that have occurred in the meantime or to people that have been redeployed in other combat situations. All that can be gleaned from military records and from interviews..

Stephanie C.: Okay. Let's see. There was somebody that's working on a group that is helping to detect bladder cancer in urine and they have sequencing tests that provide information and how it can correlate with bladder cancer, and wanted to know about any studies that are being done with veterans or with BCAN. I know, Dr. Mossanen, you're tuned in to what's going on. Can you think of any studies that are right now looking to check for bladder cancer in the VA population? Is there anything that you know of? Any clinical trials that are trying to fine tune that? It's okay if you don't.

Dr. Mossanen: None that I know of. The last time I really looked into this was maybe a year or two ago. I also looked in Student Medicine or National Academy of Sciences Report, but I don't think there's anything currently going on, at least that I know about, specifically in that population.

Stephanie C.: Okay, great. Well, I'll refer people to our clinical trials dashboard, where we have a listing of all of the clinical trials if anybody were interested in engaging. It's at bcan.org. You click the tab that says clinical trials and you can search for many different clinical trials.

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