



Vietnam Veterans of America's Veterans Health Council

Statement on the USPSTF final recommendation on the use of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) testing in the early detection of prostate cancer

Vietnam Veterans of America's Veterans Health Council strongly opposes the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) final recommendation on the use of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) testing in the early detection of prostate cancer. Some three million veterans served in Southeast Asia, and no one knows for sure how many of these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange. In November 1996 then-Secretary Jesse Brown of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) issued the final rule recognizing prostate cancer as a service-connected presumptive disease associated with exposure to Agent Orange and other phenoxy herbicides during military service. Furthermore, in 2008, University of California - Davis Cancer Center physicians released results of research showing that Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange have greatly increased risks of prostate cancer and even greater risks of getting the most aggressive form of the disease as compared to those who were not exposed. The research was also the first to utilize a large population of men in their 60s and the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test to screen for the disease. More than 13,000 Vietnam veterans enrolled in the VA Northern California Health Care System were stratified into two groups — exposed or not exposed to Agent Orange between 1962 and 1971. Based on medical evaluations conducted between 1998 and 2006, the study revealed that:

- twice as many Agent Orange-exposed men were identified with prostate cancer than non-exposed;
- Agent Orange-exposed men were diagnosed two-and-a-half years younger than non-exposed; and
- Agent Orange-exposed men were nearly four times more likely to present with metastatic disease than non-exposed.

Other prostate cancer risk factors — race, body-mass index and smoking — were not statistically different between the two groups.

Further buttressing this link, in April 2009, a study of 1,495 veterans in five cities who underwent radical prostatectomy to remove their cancerous prostates showed that 206 exposed to Agent Orange had nearly a 50 percent increased risk of their cancer recurring, despite the fact that their cancer seemed relatively nonaggressive at the time of surgery. And their cancer came back with a vengeance: the time it took the prostate specific antigen, or PSA, level to double — an indicator of aggressiveness — was eight months versus more than 18 months in non-exposed veterans.

- Thus, veterans exposed to Agent Orange are at least twice as likely to develop prostate cancer, their recurrence rates are higher, and recurring cancers are more aggressive.

If allowed to stand, USPSTF clearly abrogates its responsibility for the health and well-being of America's Vietnam veterans.

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