

2016 Research & Innovation Forum – Saturday, March 12 HealthPartners in Bloomington

**Title** Increasing Rural Family Physicians' and Vietnam War Veterans' Understanding of Agent Orange Exposure and Diabetes Mellitus Type 2

**Presenter(s)** Kirsten Larson, MS2, Kayla Schenheit, MS2, University of Minnesota and Linda Olson Bergum, M.D., Adjunct Assistant Professor & Clinical Faculty at the University of Minnesota Medical School

### Abstract

**Objective or Hypothesis** The Committee to Review the Health Effects in Vietnam Veterans due to Exposure to Herbicides has found that exposure to Agent Orange is linked to a number of chronic medical conditions including Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus. The American Diabetes Association estimates the average annual medical cost for an individual with Type 2 Diabetes to be over \$13,000 a year. Fortunately, Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and who have been diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes can apply for disability benefits to cover this cost. Unfortunately, we have noted that many Vietnam veterans and primary care physicians outside of the Veterans Affairs medical system are unaware of this. Our objective is to increase rural family physicians' and Vietnam war veterans' understanding of agent orange exposure and Diabetes Mellitus Type 2.

### Population

The population of our study is Vietnam veterans who were exposed to agent orange, and have a Type 2 Diabetes diagnosis.

### Methods

Literature review, statistician consult

### Main Results

The results of both a literature review of Agent Orange exposure and its correlation to Type 2 Diabetes, as well as our development of a novel 30-question questionnaire for interviewing Vietnam Veterans in order to gain statistically relevant information surrounding their exposure to agent orange and Type 2 Diabetes will be presented and discussed. We have also fulfilled our objective of increasing rural family physicians' and Vietnam war veterans' understanding of agent orange exposure and Diabetes Mellitus Type 2 through our various presentations. We have reached over 500 physicians and veterans through our presentations at conferences and clinics in Minnesota. Upcoming, we have a grand rounds presentation to be given by Linda Olson Bergum at the Whangaroa Health Services Trust in New Zealand, which is located in a region where agent orange was synthesized during the Vietnam war.

### Conclusions

As more rural Minnesotan veterans are expected to access care from their local non-VA healthcare providers after the passing of the Veteran Access to Care Act, it is important to bring rural family physicians up-to-date on healthcare concerns specific to the veteran population, including the association between Type 2 Diabetes and previous Agent Orange exposure.

No IRB needed for the results to be presented. The IRB for the interviews we hope to conduct with veterans is pending.

HIPAA Compliance

**Mentor(s)**Linda Olson Bergum, M.D.

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