

## Newslines Weapons and warfare

# Gulf War syndrome called very real

## Research still needed, senators told

By Kelly Kennedy

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Witnesses at a Senate hearing about Gulf War syndrome said they have come to the same conclusion: It exists, it is not psychological, and better research must be done to find treatments.

The Defense Department "has a large and shameful history regarding Gulf War syndrome," said Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., at a Senate Veterans' Affairs hearing Sept. 25. "Given that history, it's understandable people don't trust the military."

Murray said about 200,000 troops who served in the 1991 Persian Gulf War suffer "chronic multisymptom illness," such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and multiple chemical sensitivity.

"They need to know that their illnesses will be treated by the VA, and they need to know that every effort is being made to ensure that what happened to them will never

happen to future generations," she said.

Senators grilled scientists, doctors and representatives from the Pentagon and Department of Veterans Affairs about why so much research has concentrated on showing Gulf War syndrome is psychosomatic — or all in the veterans' heads — when previous studies presenting the same question had been inconclusive.

"The government has concentrated on research that finds nothing, and then does another study on the same issue," said Meryl Nass, pulmonary rehabilitation director at Mount Desert Island Hospital in Maine.

Witnesses also wanted to know why little has been done to look for links between exposure to depleted uranium, oil fires, vaccines, insecticides and sarin gas, and the symptoms veterans have exhibited.

"We need to make sure money is targeted to scientists who under-



SHEILA VEMMER/STAFF

**Lea Steele, scientific director for the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, testifies before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs subcommittee on health during a hearing on Gulf War illness on Capitol Hill.**

stand there is a problem," said Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., rather than to "a bureaucracy that keeps telling us the same thing over and over."

Lea Steele, scientific director for the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses and an epidemiologist and associate professor at Kansas State University, said Gulf War veterans

have twice the rate of Lou Gehrig's disease as other veterans, according to a VA study. They also have higher rates of brain cancer.

She recommended more studies be dedicated to multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and cancer in those veterans, noting that research has shown the chemicals Gulf War vets were exposed to can

have "toxic effects on the brain."

Julie Mock presented a picture of what living with Gulf War syndrome looks like. While still in theater, her unit's chemical alarms went off, and they lived under a cloud of oil-fire smoke that was so thick in some areas that soldiers couldn't see the sun.

She said she soon developed rashes, headaches and breathing problems. Worse, both her sons were born with various ailments including sleep apnea, learning disabilities, bipolar disorder and Tourette's syndrome.

Mock herself eventually was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and has hives, fevers, tremors, joint and muscle pain, hair loss, fatigue and memory loss.

Other veterans suffer varying degrees of some or all of the same symptoms.

Mock has had MS symptoms since 1994, but wasn't diagnosed until 2003. But to receive benefits from VA, she has to prove she had the disease within seven years of leaving the service.

"Three people within 100 yards of me [in Desert Storm] have been diagnosed with MS," she said, but the symptoms often start out mild, making it difficult to prove

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