

Newslines Weapons and warfare

the disease showed up within that seven-year window.

Murray said she is seeking legislation to lift that time limit.

Roberta White, chair of the Department of Environmental Health at the Boston University School of Public Health, talked about her recent studies that showed Gulf War veterans exposed to sarin and cyclosarin gas after U.S. forces destroyed a chemical munitions dump showed a decrease in white matter in the brain. She said the veterans had the fine motor skills of people decades older.

VA dismissed the white-matter report as "too small," and said the exposure model for sarin was incorrect, White said.

"Imaging studies tend to be small," she said. "Twenty-six subjects is actually on the large side. The exposure model we used was from DoD."

If anything, she said, the exposure model underestimated the numbers of veterans exposed and the grade of the exposure.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., said doctors should be aware that soldiers are sick, and should not slough off their conditions as simply psychosomatic.

"I think we have consensus ... that this is real," Burr said.

Steele said VA has a couple of new studies looking at issues of Gulf War veterans, but "they're not focusing on the problems we're talking about."

One is aimed at showing the usefulness of psychological therapy over the phone — which Steele noted comes after a study that concluded even face-to-face therapy had "negligible benefit."

"I certainly don't think psychiatric issues explain" Gulf War illness, White said. "Many patients don't have psychiatric symptoms."

A second VA study looks at sleep disorders in Gulf War veterans.

Researchers needed to look for specific, biological mechanisms that underlie the problems, as well as treatment for those problems, witnesses at the hearing said. Treatments already exist for fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, as well as for chemical sensitivity, Steele said.

Joel Kupersmith, chief research and development officer for the Veterans Health Administration, said those issues have been studied.

For example, critics have questioned what role, if any, the vaccines routinely given to military personnel may have in Gulf War illness. Kupersmith said new service members no longer receive vaccines if they've already had them in school — a result of looking at the effects of vaccine. And, he said, they conducted a 30-day study of small-

pox vaccine and checked recruits every day for symptoms.

Still, Dr. Michael Kilpatrick, the Pentagon's deputy director for force health protection and readiness, said the VA must not be dismissive of veterans with symptoms, and must do a better job of

educating people about research and treatment efforts.

Kilpatrick said military officials are finding that 15 percent to 20 percent of veterans of the current Iraq war are having "signs of symptoms of an ill-defined illness" that should be taken at "face value."

White said people have been suffering from similar diseases for generations, and treatments are already available if veterans have the financial resources and proper diagnosis to get help.

"There are things already on the shelf," White said. "Let's take

them off the shelf and see what's helpful to Gulf War veterans."

Mock vowed Gulf War veterans would continue to force the issue.

"We won't let you forget," she told lawmakers and government officials. "We won't let you leave us behind." □

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