

Gulf War Inpatient Hospital Medical Health Records

A new service for Gulf War veterans is now available from the Department of Defense which will give thousands of these veterans access to their inpatient Hospital Medical Health Records for the first time. This could have an impact on the denial rate of Gulf War veterans' VA disability compensation claims. Veterans can call **1-800-497-6261** to find out if their inpatient treatment record has been accounted for and to obtain the paperwork necessary to request a copy of their records from the National Personnel Records Center.

Background

Thousands of Gulf War veterans have been informed that their medical records from the Gulf War were lost or destroyed. The Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses, headed by Dr. Bernard Rostker, initiated an investigation of these missing records in January 1998.

Military Health records fall into two categories: the individual health record that accompanies the service member throughout his/her military career and the inpatient (clinical) treatment record. The inpatient treatment record is created by the admitting hospital and documents all care received by a patient while in the hospital. After being discharged from a military hospital, normally, a summary of care received is also filed with the patient's individual health record.

Discussion

Most units deployed to the Persian Gulf Theater in 1990-91 did not deploy with individual health records. Temporary records were created as individuals sought care at the unit level (e.g., the Battalion Aid Station). These "temp jackets" usually did not accompany the individual if they were evacuated to one of the dozens of hospitals set up in the theater. Consequently, documentation of inpatient care never made it to the member's temporary or permanent outpatient record. Following the war, inpatient records were sent to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, MO and were stored by the name of the hospital and month and year of treatment, not by the veteran's name and social security number. Veterans are now left to recall the name of the facility that treated them and the date of care in order to request a copy of their records. As you can imagine, most sick Gulf War veterans didn't realize the tent they were being treated in was a "hospital," and that it had a name, no less.

The services, at the urging of Dr. Rostker, have created an electronic database cross-referencing patient name, and social security number with the admitting hospital and dates for over 17,500 hospital inpatient treatment records from US military medical facilities in the Gulf. The process of identifying and inventory records is an ongoing program.

Dr. Rostker's office will assist veterans in requesting copies of their treatment records for hospitalizations that occurred in the Persian Gulf from August 1990 to August 1991. Veterans may call **1-800-497-6261** to find out if their inpatient treatment record is in the database and to obtain the paperwork necessary to request a copy of their records from the NPRC.

Please disseminate this information as widely as possible so Gulf War veterans, and their advocates, can take advantage of this new benefit provided by the Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses.