

Link found to 'Gulf War Syndrome'

WASHINGTON (AP) — There could be a link between some types of ailments suffered by Gulf War veterans and areas of their brains that have been injured by chemicals, a team of Texas researchers says.

Dr. Robert Haley, who headed a team of researchers from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, said the research is proof that a so-called "Gulf War Syndrome" actually exists.

Haley also said the symptoms of Gulf War Syndrome were due to damage in deep brain structures and were caused by chemical damage from combinations of low-level nerve gas, anti-nerve gas tablets, pesticides, DEET-containing insect repellents.

"This helps explain why there is such a variety of symptoms and why they vary somewhat from person to person," Haley said.

The findings were presented to the 86th Scientific Assembly of the Radiological Society of North America in Chicago on Monday.

They said high-tech brain scans show that damage to the right side of a region of the brain called the basal ganglia appears to cause memory lapses, impaired sense of direction, and depression.

Damage to the left basal ganglia seemed to cause general confusion, including difficulties

understanding instructions, reading, solving problems and making decisions. Damage to the brain stem accounts in part for vertigo attacks and loss of balance, the researchers said.

"This helps explain why there is such a variety of symptoms and why they vary somewhat from person to person."

— Dr. Robert Haley researcher

Haley said veterans may have more or different types of symptoms, depending on which regions of the brain were damaged by chemicals during the Gulf War.

Thousands of veterans deployed to the Middle East complain of an assortment of illnesses that have been called Gulf War Syndrome, including memory loss, anxiety, nausea, balance disturbances, abnormalities in children born after their return and chronic muscle and joint pain.

Years of controversy and study have yet to provide a cause or treatment.

Dr. Gregory J. O'Shanick, national medical director for the Alexandria, Va.-based Brain Injury Association, said the correlation between area of injury and type of symptom confirms research showing that, in general, the right and left brain hemispheres are responsible for different tasks.

"I don't think we are going to get to the point where we'll say damage to this area is going to cause this kind of symptom," said O'Shanick, emphasizing he had not seen the UT research.

Ross Perot, who helped pay for the UT team's research, testified before a Senate panel last month and accused the Department of Defense of being unwilling to retreat from early theories that the veterans' illnesses were stress-related. Defense officials denied the accusations.

Bernard Rotsker, head of the Defense Department's Gulf War illness investigations, said during the hearing that the department drew no conclusions from the UT team's research.

The DOD was unable to provide an interview with Rotsker or another official involved in Gulf War illness investigations Monday.

Haley and his team currently have a request for \$16 million pending before a government panel to expand the research and attempt to replicate the findings.

Committee reviews Houston Fire Dept

HOUSTON (AP) — A committee of 17 Houston-area residents and officials have begun investigating and assessing the problem-plagued Houston Fire Department, which is the nation's third largest.

A committee appointed by Mayor Lee Brown held its first meeting Monday to take an in-depth look at the 3,500-person fire department, which has had a tumultuous year.

Three firefighters were fired over allegations of failing to provide adequate care, and two firefighters died while battling a blaze.

"I've asked this committee to take a look at all aspects of our fire department, look at our policies, our procedures, how we interact with the community," Brown said. "We have a good fire department. However, just like many major cities, there is room for improvement. There are problems that need to be addressed."

The committee will be guided by an outside audit that cited staffing deficiencies and "serious issues of managerial leadership" within the department. A final report is due in May.

The audit pointed out a number of areas of concern, including mediocre response times for the city's Emergency Medical Service, staffing shortages among paramedics and personnel on both pumper and ladder units, and conflicts among members of top management and between management and the rank-and-file.

Acting Fire Chief Christopher Connealy, who is a member of the committee, said he believes the fire department is on its way to fixing many of the problems cited in the audit.

Brown said he formed the committee so he could get community input about ways to solve the problems the fire department is facing.

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