



In reply please quote:

13 January 2006

rec'd 16/1
in Mr. ...
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WPM 3/2

Minister of Veterans' Affairs

Research Project – Sister Chromatid Exchange in New Zealand Nuclear Test Veterans

Background

1. In 2002 the New Zealand War Pensions Medical Trust Fund, a research fund set up under the War Pensions Act 1954, funded the Massey University Institute of Molecular Biosciences to undertake a Sister Chromatid Exchange study into New Zealand Nuclear Test veterans.
2. The report of the Sister Chromatid Exchange study was received in September 2005. It had not been peer reviewed. Upon receipt, therefore, the report was sent by the Secretary for War Pensions to Professor Stephen Robertson, Professor of Paediatric Genetics at the Otago Medical School, for peer review.
3. In addition, Dr Rowland, the lead researcher, sent the report to Professor Peter Bryant at the Bute Medical School, University of St Andrews, Scotland, for peer review.

Comment

4. The sister chromatid exchange is a laboratory based assay designed to measure chromosomal damage. The report into the Sister Chromatid Exchange study indicates that sister chromatid exchange indicated that the men who participated in Operation Grapple have suffered a small but significant measure of genetic damage.
5. Both peer reviews found no fault with the methodology, but both indicate that, in their view, the researchers have not ruled out heavy cigarette smoking as a confounding factor.
6. The report also recommends that the veterans should be considered an at risk group and deserve special medical monitoring. The authors

of the report also suggest that the children of the veterans be investigated.

7. In his peer review, Professor Stephen Robertson indicates that it is unlikely that an adverse effect of the magnitude measured by the study would have a trans-generational impact.
8. It is my intention to recommend to the War Pensions Advisory Board, who oversee the War Pensions Medical Trust Fund, that the report be released on the proviso that any release includes the two peer reviews.

Implications

9. The personnel who took part in Operation Grapple have war pension coverage under the War pensions Act 1954 and are able to make application for a War Disablement Pension for any condition that they believe may be attributable to or aggravated by their service.
10. The children of Operation Grapple veterans receive additional assistance. This covers access to counselling and genetic counselling, and additional assistance to children who suffer from spina bifida and/or cleft lip/palate, adrenal gland cancer and acute myeloid leukaemia.
11. The New Zealand Nuclear Test Veterans Association is awaiting the release of the report as the members wish to use it as part of their case to sue the UK Government for compensation.
12. The UK Veterans Agency and the Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs Australia are also interested in the report. I will make copies available to them.

Recommendations

13. It is recommended that you note the contents of this report.



Jessie Gunn
Director