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Dear

Reference: Gulf War- recognition of Chronic Multi-Symptom Illnesses

I am writing to you as a long suffering Gulf 1 veteran, but I am not about to resurrect any of the old arguments surrounding 'Gulf War Syndrome' - does it or doesn't it exist, rather open up a new discourse on the importance of recognising and acknowledging the Chronic Multi-Symptom Illnesses experienced by many long suffering Gulf 1 veterans.

As I am sure you are aware many Gulf 1 veterans have struggled for many years to have their health problems recognised as something other than psychological. Understandably this has led to a large amount of bitter wrangling over the appropriate care of sick veterans. Official opinion, particularly in the USA in the last year however has slowly begun to come around to the fact that veterans are suffering from physical illness as evidence from medical studies has grown.

It is recognised Troops sent to the Gulf were given a large cocktail of vaccinations in a short period of time. In total, US servicemen may have received as many as 17 different vaccines, including live vaccines (polio and yellow fever) as well as experimental vaccines that had not been approved (anthrax, botulinum toxoid) and were of doubtful efficacy. In the UK, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has declared only 10 vaccines given but reports from veterans and official documents seem to tell a different story. The NGVFA (National Gulf Veterans and Families Association) claim that approximately 9,700 British veterans have suffered from a cocktail of Gulf-War related health problems, and have been treated in a despicable manner.

In April this year a report by The Institute of Medicine (IOM) stated that *"It is clear that a significant portion of the soldiers deployed to the Gulf War have experienced troubling constellation of symptoms that are difficult to categorise. Symptoms that cannot be easily quantified are sometimes incorrectly dismissed as insignificant and receive inadequate attention and funding by the medical and scientific establishment"*.

The report goes on to argue that medicines trouble in defining the nature or precise cause(s) of Gulf War Syndrome does not negate its existence. Based on data documenting a high rate of symptoms in former US troops who served in the Gulf War nearly 20 years ago, high quality surveys of veterans from other nations shows that many have been suffering similar chronic symptoms from gastrointestinal

illness, mental confusion, attacks of vertigo, uncontrollable mood swings, fatigue, IBS, Lou Gehrig's disease, sexual difficulties to constant body pain.

The IOM recognise that more research is required to understand the aetiology and biological underpinnings of these illnesses. As at yet the medical profession do not fully understand whether this is a single medical problem or several interrelated problems – the relationship between Gulf War illness and other multi-symptom problems.

IOM are at least starting to take seriously the problems of Gulf 1 veterans, and although this does not stop the suffering or indeed the reality of living with these conditions, it is of course a step in the right direction; trying to achieve a far fairer, more equitable medical and care service for Gulf veterans.

My question is what is happening in the UK to address Gulf War: Chronic Multi-Symptom Illnesses; how much longer must our concerns fall on deaf ears, how long must we suffer?

20 years of suffering is quite enough, therefore I hope to enlist the support of both the NGVFA and The Mark Wright Project, to help my campaign and ensure that this issue gets back on the political, medical and public agenda. The first stage will be to gather the real lived experiences of the thousands of Gulf 1 veterans across the country, and to evidence and support IOM report recognising Gulf War: Chronic Multi-Symptom Illnesses as a genuine and real chronic condition.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Stewart A Colquhoun