

The VET Registry: Greater Knowledge through Cooperation

Participants in the Vietnam Era Twin (VET) Registry continue to willingly share information essential to completing significant research studies that focus on service in Vietnam and look more broadly at health and lifestyle issues. We are able to make these comparisons because the Registry is composed of Vietnam and non-Vietnam veterans.

Without your cooperation over the past 13 years, the VET Registry would not have become the valuable research tool that it is today. Thank you, everyone, for your willingness to participate. To show what you've helped accomplish, here is information on major studies involving the Registry.

Heredity and Addiction

Results of a Harvard University study on addiction were published recently in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*. (Actual research was conducted in 1992-1996.) Using information from 3,372 Registry twin pairs, researchers found that, in

general, genetic influences seem to account for one-third of addiction, family another third and peers, and friends and co-workers the remaining third.

While genes accounted for more than half the risk of heroin addiction, the biggest factor accounting for addiction to both marijuana and psychedelic drugs was the person's non-family environment. The study failed to show that the use of less addictive drugs, such as marijuana, leads to addiction to more serious drugs like heroin or cocaine.

Traveling Studies

During the past several years, twins have been invited to travel to different sites to participate in clinical evaluations focusing on drug and alcohol use and post-traumatic stress disorder. Testing included comprehensive interviews, verbal and pencil aptitude tests, and measurements of the body's response to noise, sounds and mental challenges. Both members of a twin pair had to agree to participate.

The studies paid partici-

IN MEMORIAM

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Roger Williams, M.D., a member of the VET Registry advisory board, who died in the crash of Swissair Flight 111. He was 54.

Dr. Williams was a professor of internal medicine at the University of Utah who conducted pioneering research into the genetics of heart disease. His major research involved tracking families of patients with an inherited form of high cholesterol that contributes to heart attack and stroke deaths.

"During the 10 years that we worked with Dr. Williams, he served selflessly, sharing his insight and wisdom with our committee and the Registry's researchers," said William G. Henderson, Ph.D., the Registry's director. "His presence, opinions and encouragement were valued gifts that we sorely miss."

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in the Vietnam Era

Twin Registry

Volume 2, 1999

Did You Know . . .

- The secret for a healthier and longer life can often be found in a few simple do's and don'ts?
 - DO—Exercise regularly, eat well-balanced meals, have regular medical check-ups and practice basic safety precautions.
 - DON'T—Smoke, abuse drugs or alcohol, or ignore your health.
- In his second inaugural address in 1865, President Abraham Lincoln called upon Congress "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." This was later adopted as the VA's motto.
- As of July 1, 1997, the veteran population was estimated to be 25.6 million.
- 206 Vet Centers across the country provide psychological counseling for war-related trauma, community outreach and supportive social services to veterans and their family members.
- The VET Registry is an invaluable research resource because of its members.
- America is #1 because of its veterans!

pants' airfare, ground transportation and hotel costs, as well as a stipend to help cover meal costs and a cash incentive for participating. Funding was provided by the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Feedback from participating twins has been overwhelmingly favorable. Likewise, research investigators and their staff have enjoyed actually meeting the twins.

Ongoing Studies

- *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*—The largest of several studies on PTSD has involved 2,580 Registry members over three years. Researchers are trying to determine whether PTSD causes identifiable biological changes. A related study is trying to determine whether PTSD changes the brain. A third study is looking at sleep patterns.

- *Alcohol Use*—This study, which involves 800 pairs of twins, examines the effects of alcohol use on cognition. The study compares heavy drinkers with moderate drinkers and non-drinkers.

- *Family Study*—Starting within the next month or two, this study will include spouses and children of some Registry members as well as the members themselves. If you're asked, we hope you will encourage your family members to participate.

A New Survey Questionnaire

Enclosed with this newsletter is a short survey questionnaire that addresses male health issues and other conditions. This survey focuses on signs and symptoms of prostate disease and erectile dysfunction (impotence). As many of you may recall, the first oral medication (Viagra) for the treatment of erectile dysfunction became available just a little over a year ago.

As a spokesman for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of Viagra, former Senator Robert Dole, a veteran of World War II, has brought his personal concerns about prostate disease and erectile dysfunction into living rooms across America. Although Viagra has attracted much publicity, the true prevalence of erectile dysfunction in males 40-60 years of age is unknown. Scientific data on what role (if any) genetics plays in the development of erectile dysfunction is extremely limited.

You may find the questions on prostate disease and erectile dysfunction sensitive, but please be assured that your participation will provide much needed information. To give you as much privacy and confidentiality as possible, we will not contact you by telephone for this survey. Thus, it is important that you take time to complete and mail the questionnaire today. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact the VET Registry office at 1-800-550-9455.

BIBLIOGRAPHY**Read More About It**

If you're interested in reading the original scientific articles based on data collected through the VET Registry, here's a list of the major articles in the order in which they were published.

True, WR, Romeis, JC, Heath, AC et al. "Genetic and environmental contributions to healthcare need and utilization: A twin analysis." *Health Services Research*, 32:1:37-53, 1997.

Lyons, MJ, Toomey, R, Meyer, JM et al. "How do genes influence marijuana use? The role of subjective effects." *Addiction*, 92:409-417; 1997.

True, WR, Heath, AC, Scherrer, JF et al. "Genetic and environmental contributions to smoking." *Addiction*, 92:1277-1287, 1997.

Slutske, WS, True, WR, Scherrer, JF et al. "Long-term reliability and validity of alcoholism diagnoses and symptoms in a large national telephone survey interview." *Alcohol: Clin Exper Res*, 22:553-558, May 1998.

Lyons, MJ, Eisen, SA, Goldberg, J et al. "A Registry-based twin study of depression in men." *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 55:468-472; May 1998.

Eisen, SA, Lin, N, Lyons, MJ et al. "Familial influences on gambling behavior: An analysis of 3,359 twin pairs." *Addiction*, 93:1375-1384; 1998.

Eisen, SA, Neuman, R, Goldberg, J et al. "Contribution of emotionally traumatic events and inheritance to the report of current physical health problems in 4,042 Vietnam Era veteran twin pairs." *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 60:553-539, 1998.

A DNA Blood Bank for the Registry

Twins studies have long played an important role in helping science compare genes and the environment. During the past 10 to 15 years, studies of human genes (extracted from blood specimens) have contributed to remarkable advances in scientific knowledge.

Our genes are made of DNA packed into 23 pairs of chromosomes, each carrying thousands of genes. These genes make us who we are. They determine the color of our eyes and our height and weight. Some genes actually make us more susceptible to diabetes, cancer, heart disease and other conditions.

The VET Registry's Scientific Advisory Committee has asked the Registry to request your help in creating a DNA Blood Bank that would be made available to research scientists studying the whole spectrum of health issues.

With your cooperation, we hope that we can aid in identifying disease-causing genes, which will allow further investigation into ways to cure or alter the course of disease.

In future VET Registry studies that include clinical testing, we will also include a request for a blood specimen to be used for genetic typing (genotyping). If you

are asked to provide a blood specimen for the DNA Blood Bank, we hope you will give it serious consideration. Of course you would be provided with in-depth information before being asked to participate.

Study Participation Puts One Twin Pair in the News

Is participating in a VET Registry study newsworthy? It was for one man, whose local newspaper published an article and photograph about his experience. He traveled with his twin brother to a university in another state to participate in the study after taking part in an earlier telephone survey.

The man told the reporter that he and his brother decided to participate in VET Registry studies because they deal with issues that are important to veterans, in this case, how a person's use of alcohol is effected by psychological and biological factors.

The most recent tests were challenging and fun, the man said, but he wasn't sure how researchers would be able to figure anything out from them.

Looking back to his military service, the man said that being a twin in the armed services was unusual. "In the years I was in, in all the places I went, I never

saw another set," he said. However, he and his brother were stationed at the same base and even shared a room for a time.

(For confidentiality, identifying personal information has been excluded from this item.)

Us, Again? Registry Guidelines for Overlapping Studies

The VET Registry has guidelines for handling overlapping studies to make sure that Registry members are not being asked to participate too often in these studies.

Once contact information for a pair of twins has been given to a researcher, for example, other researchers will not be able to contact the pair until data collection for the first study is completed. Researchers also will be given the dates of the twins' last participation in a study.

The final decision on whether to participate in any study is, of course, yours to make. We appreciate your willingness to take part in these research studies and encourage you to participate at the level you find comfortable.

Who's Who at the VET Registry

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Did You Know . . .

The number of military personnel who have served in the U.S. military during war time?

American Revolution—
290,000

War of 1812—287,000

Civil War—2,213,000
Union plus 1,000,000
Confederate

Spanish-American War—
392,000

World War I—4,744,000

World War II—16,535,000

Korean Conflict—
6,807,000

Vietnam Era—9,200,000
(approx. 3,339,000 in
the Vietnam Theater)

Gulf War Era—3,900,000

Total—41,902,000*
(includes Mexican and
Indian Wars)

* Persons who served in more
than one war period are
counted only once.

Twin Times

This newsletter is published by the Vietnam Era Twin Registry to provide participants with up-to-date information about activities and research related to the VET Registry. To obtain additional copies or for more information about Twin Times or the VET Registry, contact Mary Ellen Vitek, registry coordinator and newsletter editor, at 708-345-4400.

VA BENEFITS

Healthcare Services

Starting in October 1997 the VA began a new system to provide veterans with access to a comprehensive package of VA healthcare services. The VA encourages veterans to apply for enrollment so that the VA can better plan for future healthcare needs.

If you are without or have limited health insurance or need considerable healthcare services and prescription medication, the VA may be able to help. It offers a full range of healthcare services, including medical care, audiologic (hearing) services, social and psychiatric services and rehabilitative care.

Keep Us Informed

The VET Registry staff would like to keep all participants informed about registry activities, new research findings and future projects. To do so, we encourage you to notify us of any changes in your address or telephone number:

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

HOME PHONE

WORK PHONE

**Return this form to Mary Ellen Vitek, VET Registry Coordinator,
P.O. Box 1389, Hines, IL 60141. Thank you!**

For more information about healthcare enrollment or other benefits to which you may be entitled, call 1-800-827-1000 or visit your local VA.

The VA's Web site, at www.va.gov, also contains a complete description of fed-

eral benefits for veterans and their dependents, a list of the locations of VA offices and medical centers across the country, news releases of importance to veterans and other pertinent information.

Vietnam Era Twin Registry
P.O. Box 1389
Hines, IL 60141

FORWARDING AND ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

General Health Questionnaire

Male Health Component

Fall 1999

The Registry has appreciated your participation in the multiple research projects conducted over the past 12 years.

We are currently conducting a survey that will focus on male health problems. You may find some of the questions of a sensitive and personal nature.

We assure you that this information will be kept in the strictest of confidence. The questions will help us study the issues that relate to many veterans like you and to all other adult males in the United States.

PLEASE NOTE:

All information you supply will be held in strict confidence. No individual will be identified in the published results or any study accessing data from the VET Registry. Your response is entirely voluntary and failure to provide some or all of the requested information will not in any way adversely affect you. The study has nothing to do with any compensation claims or other contacts you have with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The information asked in this survey is being collected under the authority of Title 38, Section 41 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

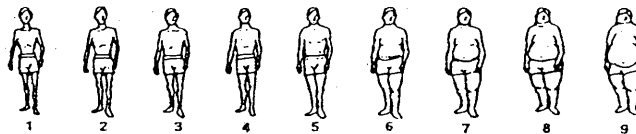
Please take a few minutes today to respond to this health questionnaire and return the completed questionnaire in the accompanying envelope. (No postage is required.)

General Health Questions

1. Has a doctor ever told you that you had:

	If yes		Do you take medication for this condition?		Year of diagnosis	
	No	Yes	No	Yes		
15 a. Arthritis of any kind or rheumatism?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
b. Asthma?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
c. Back problems (slipped or ruptured disk or sciatica)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
d. Chronic bronchitis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
e. Coronary heart disease?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
f. Diabetes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
g. Emphysema or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
h. Gastroesophageal reflux disease or reflux esophagitis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
i. Hypertension or high blood pressure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
j. Impotence or erectile dysfunction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
k. Kidney disease?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
l. Liver disease?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
m. Prostate trouble or benign prostatic hypertrophy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
n. Stroke or cerebrovascular accident?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
o. Sleep apnea?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

74 2. Body Shape: Please Circle the Body Shape that most closely resembles your body.



Male Health Questions

Please circle ONLY ONE response for each question in this section.

	Not at all	Less than 1 time in 5	Less than half the time	About half the time	More than half the time	Almost always
3a. During the last month or so, how often have you had a sensation of not emptying your bladder completely after you finished urinating?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3b. During the last month or so, how often have you had to urinate again less than 2 hours after you finished urinating?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3c. During the last month or so, how often have you found you stopped and started again several times when you urinated?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3d. During the last month or so, how often have you found it difficult to postpone urination?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3e. During the last month or so, how often have you had a weak urinary stream?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3f. During the last month or so, how often have you had to push or strain to begin urination?	0	1	2	3	4	5

Questionnaire continues on the back of this sheet.

↑ DETACH HERE ↓

Male Health Questions, continued

81 Please circle **ONLY ONE** response for each question in this section.

- 3g. During the past month, how many times did you most typically get up to urinate from the time you went to bed at night until the time you got up in the morning?
- | None | 1 time | 2 times | 3 times | 4 times | 5 or more times |
|------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
- 3h. During the past month, how would you rate your ability to maintain an erection?
- | Very good | Good | Fair | Poor | Very poor | Have not had an erection within the past month |
|-----------|------|------|------|-----------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
- 3i. During the past month, how would you rate your ability to have an erection?
- | Very good | Good | Fair | Poor | Very poor | Have not had an erection within the past month |
|-----------|------|------|------|-----------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
- 3j. During the past month, how many days did you engage in sexual activity?
- | None | 1-4 days | 5-10 days | 11-15 days | 16-20 days | More than 20 days |
|------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------------|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
- 3k. In the past month, how often have the issues listed below interfered with your sexual activity? (Circle **ONLY ONE** response for each line.)
- | | None of the time | A little of the time | Some of the time | Most of the time | All of the time |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Physical health | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Emotional problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Family stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Job stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Financial stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Sleep and Work Patterns

90 We all know that sleep is important to our health. The next set of questions will allow us to study the sleep habits of Registry members.

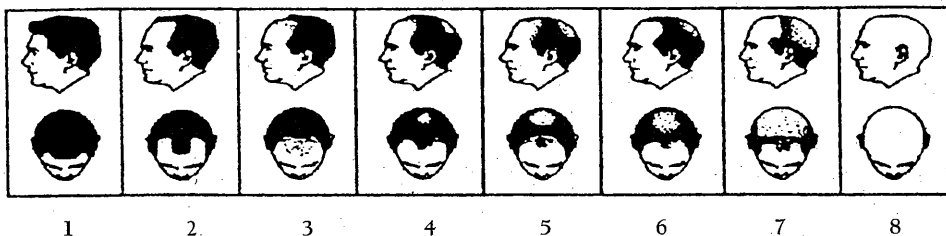
- 4a. What shift do you usually work?
 Day shift Second shift Third shift Rotating shifts Retired, disabled or unemployed
- 4b. On average, how many hours of sleep do you usually get in a 24-hour period?
- | 12 or more hrs. | 10-11 hrs | 8-9 hrs. | 6-7 hrs | 4-5 hrs. | Less than 4 hrs. |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|---------|----------|------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
- 4c. How would you rate your snoring?
- | I snore heavily | I snore but not heavily | I do not snore | I do not know if I snore |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Smoking and Alcohol Use

- 5a. Do you currently smoke cigarettes? No Yes
- 5b. In the past month, have you had at least one drink of beer, wine or liquor? No Yes

Hair Pattern

6. Circle the hair pattern that most closely resembles your hair pattern. Do not consider styling or shaving that is done to your hair.



We'd Like to Keep Mailing You *Twin Times*

We would like keep you informed of VET Registry activities and ensure that you continue to receive *Twin Times*. Please provide us with your current address and telephone numbers by filling out the form below.

NAME (Please print all information on this form.)	ADDRESS	STATE	ZIP CODE
		CITY	WORK PHONE
		HOME PHONE	E-MAIL ADDRESS

95 Be sure to detach and mail the questionnaire today. Thank you!