

To: Chair, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Advisory Committee
From: Joseph D. Landson, former CTI1(NAC), USN
Subj: A veteran's experience with CFS care

Dr. Snell, Dr. Jones, and members of CFSAC,

I'm writing to relate my experiences as a veteran trying to get help for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome through the Department of Veteran's Affairs Health System.

Having spent six months ruling out all other illnesses by taxpayer-funded process of elimination, VA clinicians have grudgingly conceded I have CFS, but so far have been unable or unwilling to do anything about it. VA specialists in Neurology, Rheumatology, and Infectious Diseases have respectively told me:

- a.) to await a major relapse and seek treatment then, when I might be taken seriously;
- b.) it's just a subset of depression and I should get over it, or
- c.) it's very interesting, but not our problem, and we couldn't do anything about it if it were.

Otherwise, VA clinicians have diagnosed me with two other things: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. They've done this because they assumed my shortness of breath from exertion was in fact a panic attack; furthermore, they seem to want to help me get government compensation for a condition I likely don't have (PTSD), rather than figuring out the illness I do have. The CTS was invoked to explain my aching joints. This, despite the fact that my joint pain developed suddenly, over the course of a few hours, equally in both wrists and both ankles. They are also disregarding their own EMG test, which showed only very mild CTS in my right wrist, and none at all in my tested left ankle.

As for PTSD, it's my considered if unlicensed view that if I have it at all, then my experiences with the VA caused it. In their non-treatment of CFS, the VA have given no indication that they have learned anything from the Gulf War Illness debacle. Moreover, the VA is missing out on a tremendous opportunity to cross-fertilize legitimate CFS and GWI research, from which both patient communities and their utterly baffled health care providers could benefit hugely.

In summary, over eight months of trying to get help, I have accomplished nothing but waste valuable time and resources -- mine and the taxpayers. I cannot say I regret my military service -- it was an honor and a privilege. However I do regret ever seeking VA medical help. Giving up on them, I have since started over with private CFS experts at my personal expense.