

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Use of the Quinoline anti-malarial drugs Mefloquine and Tafenoquine in the Australian
Defence Force
2018 - 2019 – 30 August 2018
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Question

Topic: Enoggera GP's initial issues regarding the pre-deployment Mefloquine trial.
(Written Question on Notice)

The Chair Senator Alex Gallacher asked:

The committee understands that doctors at Enoggera raised initial issues regarding the pre-deployment Mefloquine trial. Could DVA provide details of the issues raised by the GPs.

Answer

DVA was not involved with the pre-deployment trial and as a result is unable to answer this question.

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Question 3

Topic: GP awareness programs

(Written Question on Notice)

The Chair Senator Alex Gallacher asked:

The committee understands that DVA conducted general awareness for General Practitioners in Townsville. Could DVA please provide details of when, where and how many of these GP awareness programs were undertaken?

- a. What was the format of the GP awareness program? What information/documentation was provided to the GPs?

Answer

On 30 September 2016 DVA's Chief Health Officer wrote to all General Practitioners (GPs) to bring their attention to information that may assist in managing patients who had taken mefloquine.

Ahead of the outreach program in December 2016, Townsville-based GPs and psychologists were invited to an information session on 29 November 2016. They were provided with information about mefloquine and the outreach program. Their assistance was sought in raising awareness of the outreach program in Townsville.

A copy of the letter to GPs and the presentations given at the information session can be found on the DVA website at www.dva.gov.au/mefloquine.

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Question 8

Topic: Sufferers of Mefloquine and Tafenoquine?

(Written Question on Notice)

The Chair Senator Alex Gallacher asked:

How does DVA recognise sufferers of Mefloquine and Tafenoquine?

Answer

Current and former members of the ADF who suffer from a diagnosed health condition which they believe relates to their service, including a condition resulting from use of mefloquine, tafenoquine, or other anti-malarial drugs, can submit a claim to DVA.

DVA recognises mefloquine and tafenoquine as potential causal factors for 16 conditions, as listed in the table below. Of these, mefloquine is recognised as potential causal factors for 15 conditions and tafenoquine six conditions.

Mefloquine and tafenoquine as a potential causal factor

Condition	Anti-malarial medication
1. Anxiety disorder	Mefloquine
2. Bipolar disorder	Mefloquine
3. Depressive disorder	Mefloquine
4. Heart block	Mefloquine
5. Myasthenia gravis	Mefloquine
6. Peripheral neuropathy	Mefloquine
7. Schizophrenia	Mefloquine
8. Suicide and attempted suicide	Mefloquine
9. Trigeminal neuropathy	Mefloquine

10. Epileptic seizure	Mefloquine and Tafenoquine
11. Acquired cataract	Mefloquine and Tafenoquine
12. Sensorineural hearing loss	Mefloquine and Tafenoquine
13. Tinnitus	Mefloquine and Tafenoquine
14. Psoriasis	Mefloquine and Tafenoquine
15. Methaemoglobinaemia	Tafenoquine
16. Toxic retinopathy	Mefloquine

DVA can also provide services and support to people who have concerns about mental health via non-liability health care. Under these arrangements, DVA can pay for treatment for any mental health condition without the need for the conditions to be accepted as related to service. This is known as non-liability health care and it is available to anyone with one day of continuous full-time service and some reservists.

Non-liability health care can be provided for any mental health condition which is included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, version 5 (DSM-5). This includes brain injury and cognitive impairment.

In addition, the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service has identified a need to develop improved service responses to veterans and family members where the veteran has a presentation which may indicate symptoms of neurocognitive disorder. It is anticipated that the Neurocognitive Assessment Pilot will commence in early 2019.

Independent of the claims process, mental health services are also available from the VVCS to all current and former serving personnel with at least one day's full time service, and their families, as well as Reservists with a DVA White Card.

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Question 9

Topic: Outreach to identify and assist sufferers of Mefloquine and Tafenoquine?

(Written Question on Notice)

The Chair Senator Alex Gallacher asked:

What is DVA doing and in terms of outreach to identify and assist sufferers of Mefloquine and Tafenoquine?

Answer

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) will be holding a series of Mefloquine and Tafenoquine Consultation Forums across Australia from September 2018. The first forum was held in Adelaide on 26 September 2018. Forty people attended this forum.

DVA is planning to host additional forums in Sydney, Brisbane, Townsville, Perth, Melbourne and Darwin. If strong interest from the ex-serving community is shown outside of these locations, DVA will endeavour to arrange additional forums, or explore other means of engaging.

The remaining forums will be held between late October and late November 2018. DVA is currently finalising dates and venues. Once the details of these events are confirmed, they will be publicised in newspapers and on social media. Direct invitations will also be sent to local organisations and individuals. Information will be available on the DVA website at www.dva.gov.au/mefloquine

The purpose of the forums is to provide an opportunity to hear from current and former serving members about their health concerns, and outline the treatments, services and supports available. This will help DVA to better understand the needs of those who have concerns about these medications and to direct them quickly to available treatment options.

Information will also be provided on currently available services and supports, with DVA, Defence and Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service staff present to provide one-on-one assistance if required.