

**From The Chief Medical Officer:
Dr Henrietta Campbell**

**Castle Buildings
Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast BT4 3SJ**

**Telephone: 01232 520563
Fax: 01232 520574**

E-Mail: henrietta.campbell@dhssni.gov.uk

HSS(MD)2/2001

To: All General Practitioners
Chief Executives of Boards
Directors of Public Health of Boards
GP Medical Advisers of Boards
Medical Directors of HPSS Trusts

16 January 2001

Dear Colleague

PATIENT ENQUIRIES ABOUT DEPLETED URANIUM (DU) EXPOSURE.

1. You may be aware of the recent concern expressed about possible exposure of UK forces to Depleted Uranium (DU) in the Balkans. Last week the Ministry of Defence (MOD) announced that they would be identifying an additional voluntary screening programme for our Service personnel and civilians who have served in the Balkans. The MOD announcement may lead to servicemen and others contacting their GPs for advice.
2. MOD have sought our assistance in ensuring that all HPSS doctors are aware of what to do in the event that ex-Servicemen or ex-MOD civilian employees present themselves to their GP or Consultant and ask for screening. MOD have supplied the attached briefing (Annex A) for GPs which gives the background on the possible health hazards from exposure to DU and who to contact for further information.
3. Further Information can be sought from the MOD helplines attached. For other information regarding this message contact Dr Paul Darragh on Tel: 028 90520709.

Yours sincerely

HENRIETTA CAMPBELL (Dr)

ADVICE FROM THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE TO GPs AND CONSULTANTS IN EVENT OF AN ENQUIRY FROM A PATIENT BELIEVING THEMSELVES TO BE SUFFERING ILL EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO DEPLETED URANIUM(DU).

1. Doctors will no doubt be aware of the health concerns of Servicemen, ex-Servicemen, MOD employees and ex-employees over exposure to Depleted Uranium (DU) found in some ammunition. DU is uranium from which the more radioactive isotopes have been removed and which is therefore less radioactive than natural uranium. It has long been recognised, however, that on the battlefield its debris might present a hazard from chemical toxicity, in the same way as would any heavy metal such as lead, and a low level radiological hazard. The risk from chemical toxicity would arise from ingestion of the soluble depleted uranium oxides, and the radiological risk primarily from inhalation of the insoluble depleted uranium oxides. These risks arise from the dust created when DU strikes a hard target such as an armoured vehicle. Expended rounds or solid fragments of DU pose a negligible hazard.
2. The Ministry of Defence is of the belief that the risk to UK Service or civilian personnel as a result of exposure to DU is low and unlikely to be of significance to health, provided that relevant Health and Safety practices are followed (Ref 1). Notwithstanding this, the Government has announced that it will identify an additional appropriate voluntary screening programme for Service and ex-Service personnel and civilians who have served in the Balkans. The nature and scope of such a screening programme has yet to be determined and this circular provides interim guidance on how to manage patients who might present to GPs or hospital specialists for advice.
3. As an interim measure, those personnel who are concerned that they may have been exposed to DU when serving in the Balkans should be considered in 2 main groups as determined by clinical need, as follows:
 - a. Those in whom there is a genuine belief that they have had exposure to DU and who either exhibit signs or symptoms of heavy metal poisoning or neoplasia. For these:

Primary care clinical consultation. If referral to a secondary care consultant has not already taken place, the patient should be referred for clinical care in the normal way.

Tertiary care referral/advice. If a hospital physician has any suspicion that the illness may be due to DU, they are advised to establish liaison with the extant Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) consultants at St Thomas's Hospital for further advice and/or investigation (Tel No: 0207-2028322, fax: 0207-2028327).
 - b. Those who are well in themselves (i.e. no clinical indications), or have an illness that is neither neoplastic nor due to heavy metal, but are concerned about possible exposure should be reassured that DU poses little risk and is unlikely to be the cause of any illness that they have. They should however be advised that MOD is seeking to identify a screening programme for those likely to have been exposed to DU and if they want further information they should ring the MOD Help Lines on 0800 169 4495 or 0800 169 5401.

Reference:

1. Further information on DU for medical officers is available at <http://www.mod.uk/policy/gulfwar/info/dutesting/htm>