Case Studies:

From 1969 to 1985 a Vietnam veteran experienced electric shocks throughout the body, digestive problems, urinary problems with severe temporarily paralyzing seizures of the chest muscles and diaphragm, making it impossible to breathe. The medical diagnosis was “hyperventilation” in 1969 and a “mental” problem in 1985 when the veteran no longer had the strength to complete the physical exercise requirements of an active duty soldier. Infusions of gamma globulin since 2004 helps the patient now breathe and talk at the same time while preventing these dangerous attacks.

As the veterans’ symptoms grew progressively worse, he was sent to a neurologist for the first time in 1983. A Board Certified Neurologist stated they “doubted the symptoms were neurological” sending the veteran back to duty. Current statements by medical experts in retrospect note the veterans symptoms involved Chronic Autonomic Neuropathy from 1969 on.

Attempts to diagnose the years of digestive problems and electric shocks for this veteran in 1986 were equally evasive when a gastroenterologist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center dismissed the symptoms as related to the food the veteran ate. This doctor did not have the tools or knowledge to diagnose the well-established symptoms of Autonomic Peripheral Neuropathy.

In 2001 a leading Neurologist in a neuropathy center, where the veteran was sent by their primary doctor with a diagnosis of Peripheral Neuropathy, dismissed the claims stating that “patient is claiming to have something he does not have”, based on their theory of diminished reflexes and neuropathy.

In 2004, a VA doctor after looking at the veteran’s symptoms and with no training in neurology since 1960, without knowledge of the effects of gamma globulin they were receiving, stated that he could not find any reason for the veteran’s symptoms and dismissed them denying any help. By VA law any medical doctor in the VA system can evaluate a veteran, regardless of their specialty or qualifications.

The VA New Concept:

Commenting on the Federal Register proposal, it would have been more important in “serving those who served”, to recognize the Chronic Peripheral Neuropathies as due to Agent Orange exposure when no other cause can be established for the veterans symptoms.

The exceptions would be the recognition of chronic peripheral neuropathy as secondary to cancer, diabetes, and the treatment of the cancers and for any disease recognized as presumptive to AO exposure by the VA and established as a cause of neuropathy by the medical community.

As for the outdated presumptive periods for the onset of symptoms in various disease processes established by the VA, these need to be eliminated as having little basis in science and unnecessary hurdles for veterans especially regarding the destructive unknowns regarding Agent Orange exposure. These presumptive periods for the onset of symptoms create mass confusion contributing to the current backlog of claims.
Finally, the decade’s long discussion of the VA policy of rewarding VA reviewers based on the number of cases processed, rather than on the quality and accuracy of their review, needs to be changed immediately.

References:
1. Norman Latov, MD, PhD, Director Neuropathy Center of Excellence, Weill Medical College, Cornell University, Peripheral Neuropathy: When the Numbness, Weakness, and Pain Won’t Stop, 2007 AAN Press
2. Thomas H. Brannagan, MD, Director, Neuropathy Center of Excellence, Columbia University, as quoted in the DVD production Coping with Chronic Neuropathy, 2010, Neuropathy Support Network.
4. Toxicology: 2,3,7,8-TCDD Neurotoxicity in Neuroblastoma Cells is caused by Increased oxidative stress, intracellular calcium levels; and tau phosphorylation by Donggun Sul, et al, Environmental Toxicology and Pharmaco & Proteomic Center, College of Medicine Korea University, Republic of Korea.
8. Peripheral Neuropathy: A Practical Approach to Diagnosis and Management by Dr. Didier Cross, M.D., Editor, 2001 (Toxic Neuropathies by Dr. Alan Berger)
10. The December 2007 minutes of the Institute of Medicine reported on the research at the University Of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine.
12. See VFW Magazine, October 2011, page 12, Agent Orange Benefits Preserved from acts by the 2011 Congress!