



## Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 84

### PROTECTING THE HEALTH OF US MILITARY FORCES -- A NATIONAL OBLIGATION

During ADM Loy's appearance before the National Press Club on 24 February 2000, in response to a question from the audience, the Commandant stated that it was the utmost imperative for the Coast Guard to ensure our men and women, who are often asked to go in harms way, receive the very best force protection we can provide. Although the question specifically asked about the increasing threats to our boarding parties, our forces must be protected during all possible missions. Our role in military preparedness for national defense requires other types of force protection. One is the anthrax vaccination program.

"Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine," a journal dedicated to aerospace medical research and clinical practice, published an article in its March edition describing improved strategies to protect the health of U.S. military forces.

The article introduces the military's new "Force Health Protection" strategy that is designed to provide maximum health protection to servicemembers throughout their careers. The article uses a review of recent experiences involving the anthrax vaccine to illustrate the role for a scientific standard and better health communication in developing and implementing military health policy.

"Clinical care and preventive medicine decisions must be based on sound science," said Dr. Sue Bailey, assistant secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. "Our men and women in uniform deserve nothing less. Then we must communicate with them accurately about our decisions."

The article points out that the anthrax vaccine is necessary to protect military men and women because it is impossible to rapidly and reliably detect the microscopic, odorless, and colorless anthrax spores, which can be dropped unnoticed onto a chaotic battlefield or secretly dispersed in buildings where troops are housed.

Misinformation, the article states, has created doubts about the anthrax vaccination program. For example, the anthrax vaccine has been licensed since 1970 and has full Food and Drug Administration approval, but some reports try to portray the vaccine as an experimental product.

The article also points out that other criticisms of the anthrax vaccine program disregard modern concepts of medicine and clearly are attempts to discredit a large-scale vaccination program. Opposition to the military's administration of the anthrax vaccine has been caught up in a broader advocacy against vaccines, including the routine childhood vaccinations that have saved countless lives during the last half century.

"As in the decision to vaccinate troops against anthrax, we have to use peer-reviewed scientific data to evaluate benefits and risks of all medical care and preventive medicine measures," said Bailey. "Only sound science -- not untested opinion or anecdote -- can guide policy formulation in health care."

The journal facilitates communication among civilian and military physicians, life scientists, bioengineers, and medical specialists working in aerospace medicine in basic medical research and in its clinical applications. It is distributed to more than 80 countries.

Regards, FL Ames

## TRICARE ASSISTANCE SPECIAL NOTE

Recent information about the TRICARE Help Email System (THEMS) has prompted many questions about this new problem resolution system.

The THEMS expands health benefits advice and TRICARE problem resolution to the email system. THEMS is available to all TRICARE beneficiaries, including Active Duty, dependents and retirees and their dependents. This is not a Coast Guard specific system, and it may be staffed by members unfamiliar with Coast Guard specific problems. There is currently no method for problems uncovered by THEMS to be redirected back to the Coast Guard for policy change. However, please feel free to use THEMS especially to address questions of a general nature. The email address is: [TRICARE\\_Help@amedd.army.mil](mailto:TRICARE_Help@amedd.army.mil).

We strongly encourage Coast Guard beneficiaries to direct specific questions regarding medical issues to use the existing Coast Guard information system. The Coast Guard continues to provide many methods to get TRICARE information and help with problem resolution. We recommend you contact your local Health Benefits Advisor first. If that is unsuccessful, try calling the 1-800-9HBA HBA (1-800-942-2422) toll free health benefits help line, and you will be automatically be routed to Coast Guard health benefits advisors at the correct MLC. The Coast Guard does offer email health benefits advice as well:

MLC LANT can be found on SWSIII Global Address List under HBALant ([HBALant@mlca.uscg.mil](mailto:HBALant@mlca.uscg.mil)).

MCPAC can be found on SWSIII Global Address List under TRICARE ([TRICARE@d11.uscg.mil](mailto:TRICARE@d11.uscg.mil)).

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