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Doubt fogs defoliant's effects

By SALLY HODGKINSON
Of the Emerald

No one is sure of the effects of Agent Orange on Vietnam veterans, four panelists agreed during a regional conference for Vietnam-era veterans at the University Saturday.

But the two veteran activists and two Veterans Administration doctors disagreed on the medical risks of Agent Orange

and whether veterans should be compensated for medical problems attributed to the defoliant.

"There are lots of questions and much confusion," said Keith Martin, a faculty member at Stanford University and the environmental health physician at Palo Alto's VA hospital.

Martin said lab tests on animals indicate that dioxin, the main toxin in Agent Orange, causes medical damage, but the effects vary from animal to animal.

"Clearly, it's cause for alarm," but Agent Orange's effect on humans is still unknown, Martin said.

"Science is not going to give us the answer to this problem,"

said Paul Merrell, a member of the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides and a member of a national task force on Agent Orange.

Merrell added it is obvious that Agent Orange causes many medical problems the VA refuses to recognize.

But the biggest obstacle preventing recognition of these medical problems is disagreement among veterans, he said.

"Our own house is not in order when it comes to Agent Orange."

Because of the political and financial strength of chemical

companies, veterans need to band together on the issue if they want to make progress, Merrell said.

Don Belcher, a Seattle VA hospital physician, said the hospital has tested 600 veterans for symptoms of Agent Orange poisoning since November, 1978. Reactions to dioxin poisoning include minor skin diseases and minor nervous system disorders, Belcher said.

Most veterans tested for those medical problems were not directly exposed to Agent Orange, Belcher said.

"A lot of people think that there was an orange cloud over Vietnam and no matter where you were, you were exposed."

Numb emotions follow Vietnam veterans home

By SALLY HODGKINSON
Of the Emerald

A well-dressed man walked into the veteran center in Portland, drew the shades and asked center director Mike

Maxwell who would listen to him.

The man, a successful and happily married lawyer, talked for three hours about his experiences in Vietnam 13 years earlier, things he'd never told anyone.

Many Vietnam veterans are sharing feelings among themselves for the first time in years, Maxwell told a panel discussing the delayed stress-reaction syndrome — feelings they had been numb to during those years.

The workshop was part of the Second Annual Western Conference for Vietnam-era veterans held Saturday.

Maxwell estimated that 750,000 to 1 million of the 8.9 million men and women who served in Vietnam still are suffering from the war — many from delayed stress.

"But let's not make a mistake and call veterans 'walking time bombs.' They are not mentally ill."

While in Vietnam, many veterans shut off their emotions and reactions to war and continued to suppress their feelings once they returned home, said Maxwell, a Vietnam veteran.

"The most important thing was to get back in one piece. You learn to stuff your emotions to become an effective combat

soldier. It wasn't like the John Wayne wars on TV. It wasn't glorious or honorable."

If not dealt with, the emotional numbness can lead to anger, alienation, guilt, distrust of authority, nightmares, drug abuse or personal relationship problems, Maxwell said.

University psychology Prof. Linda Sherman estimated that 40-60 percent of Vietnam combat veterans suffer from some form of delayed stress.

Audience reaction to the panel varied. Some veterans said the problem may be in society, not them.

"Let's use our anger to change the society that caused it in the first place," one vet suggested.

"Anyone who has been in the military experiences stress," a woman veteran said.

A few veterans spoke for the first time in public about their war experiences.

"I put my time in, and I survived," said one. "Being back in this country is survival all over again. I got all the benefits of being a vet: a Seiko watch, my divorce papers and rambling feet."

"I don't know about delayed stress," said another veteran. "I'm just trying to make it though life."



human sexuality

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May 15-17

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 Lonnie Barbach, Clinical professor of Medical Psychology - University of California Medical School
 Richard Green, Psychiatry professor - State University of New York at Stony Brook.

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