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**Description Notes** Alvin L. Young filed this item under "Vietnam Veterans Twin Study." Discusses Hobson's Option and Decision Paper regarding continuation of the study.

DR ALVIN YOUNG

The attached may  
be of interest to you.

Y

## REPORT OF CONTACT

Contacted by: Larry Hobson  
Date of Contact: February 27, 1984

Hobson has been asked to prepare an Option and Decision Paper for review by the CMD. He was calling to read his current draft to me for my comments. The various options that Hobson will present are:

1. Discontinue the VETS, including withdrawing from Twinfind

Pro - money will be saved

Con - the VA will be subject to adverse criticism

2. Direct that a non-VA contractor perform the entire study

Pro - claims of possible VA bias in the data collection and analysis will be eliminated

Con - bias does not appear to be a major issue (note the Ranch Hand study's relative freedom from the bias criticism), the cost of the project under contract will markedly increase, there will be a demoralizing effect on the project's principal investigators, and the VA will appear to lack confidence in the quality of its own research

3. Continue the NAS Twinfind and questionnaire survey but abandon the St. Louis intensive health assessment portion

Pro - money will be saved and the twin register concept and its future scientific value will be retained

Con - the NAS questionnaire is so limited in scope that its value to the VA will be minimal, and the VA will be subject to the criticism of refusing to support quality research because of what might be revealed

4. Support only the NAS Twinfind but expand the detail in the mailed questionnaire, perhaps including a telephone survey

Pro - the cost of the project will be reduced and the expanded questionnaire will increase the usefulness of the data

Con - the data will be of questionable reliability, its usefulness will be quite limited, and the cost savings will be reduced because of the increased cost of the expanded questionnaire survey

5. Retain the VETS in its current format, with or without modification. The following are possible modifications:

a. Perform the psychological assessment under contract

Pro - the criticism of bias in the data collection will be reduced

Con - the cost will be increased

b. Eliminate some of the proposed expensive medical tests but retain the performance of the psychological assessment by the VA

Pro - the cost of the project will be reduced

Con - the VA may still be criticized for purposely performing an incomplete research project

c. Continue the present VETS plan in an unmodified form

Pro - an excellent study, approved by the CSP, will thereby result and be subject to the least criticism from the scientific community and the general public

Con - the study will be subject to the criticism of bias and high cost

Hobson said that his own position is option 5b. He will recommend eliminating tests such as the endocrine and immunologic studies, and the cytogenetic analyses. He personally is in favor of retaining the sleep study. I mentioned to him that this would reduce the overall cost of the project by only several hundred thousand dollars. He agreed and pointed out that he purposely projected no cost saving figures in the Option and Decision Paper. He hoped that antagonists within the VA will be satisfied with an apparent cost reduction victory while the study will actually remain essentially intact. He agreed that he had little idea of how well this strategy might work. "I don't know the best way to play this," he said. Hobson said there is supposed to be a meeting with Custis later this week to discuss the VETS.

#### SOME PERSONAL COMMENTS

In response to one of my questions, Hobson noted that Greene is the main antagonist to the VETS. "Greene has been talking quite loudly." Hobson noted, however, that Boren had not yet taken any public stand. Greene is arguing that the study does not have sufficient statistical power. However, our sample size analysis (which no one has criticized) demonstrates that this is not valid. Greene is also arguing that the twin concept is not appropriate to the questions being addressed. But our review groups, who include some of the most prestigious members of the scientific community, do not agree.

It seems to me that Greene's objections may be based, in part, on a "hidden agenda". Hobson noted that in a recent meeting, Greene became very angry and accused the Agent Orange Projects Office (AOPO) of not informing him about every aspect of the progress of the project. Perhaps this represents one aspect of the true problem. That is, Greene feels that the AOPO is exercising too much power in Greene's domain. Perhaps the real conflict is a "turf battle".