

# south east asian treaty organisation (seato)

## december 2001 nurse update

In August this year the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) wrote to approximately 100 civilian nurses with information about the campaign to enable members of civilian surgical and medical teams who served in Viet Nam the right to claim repatriation benefits under the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986.

Forty nurses responded and most have elected to be placed on a mailing list for further information.

The ANF will maintain regular and ongoing contact with this group to report on issues as the campaign progresses over 2002.

Further information will be provided early in 2002.

If you have any queries or comments, please contact Debbie Richards at the ANF Federal Office on 03 9639 5211 or email [debbie@anf.org.au](mailto:debbie@anf.org.au)



### Post Election Update

#### 1. Veterans' Entitlements Act

After obtaining a commitment from both the Australian Labour Party and the Democrats to support an amendment to the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 to enable SEATO nurses to claim benefits under that legislation, our hopes for an early resolution to this issue have been dashed with the election of the Howard Government last month.

The new Minister for Veterans' Affairs is Mrs Danna Vale, member for Hughes (NSW). She was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1996 and since entering Parliament has served on various committees including: Committees for Family and Community Affairs; Communications, Transport and Microeconomic Reform; and Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

The ANF will be seeking a meeting with the Minister early in the new year to continue the campaign on behalf of SEATO nurses for recognition under the Veterans' Entitlements Act.

#### 2. COMCARE Claims

The Government's position is that nurses injured or suffering an illness as a result of their service in Viet Nam should claim under COMCARE the workers compensation scheme for Commonwealth employees. As you will be aware the ANF is strongly of the view that this is not the appropriate scheme for war related injuries and illness and earlier this year we argued this point at a meeting with the then Minister, Bruce Scott.

As a result a number of measures were put in place to facilitate nurses' claims through COMCARE. While much has been done by the Department to assist the claims process and ease the burden administratively, it does not change the fundamental difference between the two schemes which relate to one being a workers compensation scheme, and the other more akin to social security.

A number of nurses have claims pending under the COMCARE Scheme. Some have been successfully resolved in part with satisfactory outcomes particularly those claims for post traumatic stress disorder. However, as expected, the claims concerning physical illness and injury are proving more difficult due to the higher standard of proof required under the COMCARE legislation. Many nurses are being assisted by both the ANF and Greg Isolani, a solicitor with a history of involvement in this issue and experience in the area.

#### 3. The Campaign in 2002

The ANF will continue the campaign into 2002 beginning with a meeting with the new Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

The next step will be to review all the options available to pursue entitlements under the Veterans' Entitlements Act and adopt a strategy to achieve that goal. In developing a strategy the ANF will continue to work closely with the Civilian Nurses, Australian Surgical Teams, Viet Nam (CN-ASTV) group and maintain regular contact with all SEATO nurses on the mailing list.