



By Debbie Richards
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Important news for Vietnam nurses The campaign continues

The campaign for South East Asian Trades Organisation (SEATO) nurses to receive recognition for their service in Vietnam as 'Veterans', and to receive compensation for injuries and diseases arising from that service, continues.

This long running political campaign has been fought jointly by the ANF, and Dot Angell on behalf of Civilian Nurse and Surgical Team members.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Bruce Scott, has stubbornly refused to accept the recommendations from the Mohr review to define SEATO nurses as Veterans, and has urged those who may have suffered from an injury or disease following their service in Vietnam to lodge compensation claims for benefits pursuant to the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (SRCA or COMCARE)*.

The Labor party has pledged to support the SEATO nurses when they are in government to receive benefits as paid to the other 'Vietnam Veterans' under the *Veterans Entitlement Act*.

The Democrats have also confirmed their commitment to continue to support SEATO nurses in the fight to gain access to benefits under the *Act*.

The proposed changes to COMCARE

While Minister Scott is eagerly passing the nurses' claims over to COMCARE, arguing that this is the most appropriate scheme, his colleague, Tony Abbott, Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Small Business, is

pushing ahead with legislation to make it even harder for nurses to claim under COMCARE.

One of the last legacies that the former minister responsible for COMCARE, Peter Reith left to injured SEATO nurses, (and all other Commonwealth Workers), was to introduce an amendment into Parliament on 8 December 2000, to alter the definition and requirement as to whether the service contributed to a 'disease'.

The irony is that the Department of Veterans Affairs, through a large body of medical evidence from the Repatriation Medical

COMCARE claim, will have even greater difficulty establishing a link between the disease and service in Vietnam.

The Reith proposal to amend the COMCARE legislations means that conditions relating to time spent in Vietnam will not be accepted as arising out of service if individuals cannot show a 'close connection' between their service and their condition.

The amendments proposed will 're-define' whether injuries or diseases are in fact 'work related' (ie related to time spent in Vietnam) and will put the pressure back on individuals to

Vietnam may not be enough to show a 'close connection'.

Alternatively, COMCARE may rely on other factors such as whether individuals smoke or have other factors in their lives that may have caused a condition to occur, such as a predisposing family history - whatever 'other matters' they can think of.

This latest proposal is just another reason why COMCARE is not the appropriate scheme to compensate SEATO nurses and why the ANF remains committed to pursuing nurses' entitlements under the *Veterans' Entitlements Act*.

However, in the meantime it is essential that all SEATO nurses suffering illness and or injury relating to their time in Vietnam, make a claim under COMCARE as soon as possible to avoid any further complications arising from the proposed amendments.

Those nurses who have had claims rejected should appeal as soon as possible so that their appeals will be considered under the current definition and criteria.

Contact Debbie Richards at the ANF Federal Office on (03) 9639 5211 for further advice and assistance.

Also, write to the Democrats and the Australian Labor Party to urge that they reject this legislation in its present form. See the ANF website for further details.

- Debbie Richards and Greg Isolani (from Ryan Carlisle Thomas)

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Authority, have long known of the connection between service in Vietnam and certain diseases (ie exposure to chemicals such as Agent Orange).

Similarly, it is known that exposure to traumatic, violent conflicts in theatres of war can lead to psychological disease processes such as post traumatic stress disorder.

If Mr Reith's amendment goes through, nurses who have suffered illness and injury due to exposure and experiences in Vietnam, who have not lodged a

show if there is such a 'close connection'.

So just what is a 'close connection'? The Bill says it is what COMCARE will take into account. This includes medical predisposition; activities not related to an individual's employment; other 'matters' affecting their health; the nature of the tasks involved in an individual's 'work'; and, how long they have been 'working'.

For example, COMCARE could argue that the relatively short duration of deployment in