



HEALTH AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE ARMED FORCES EPIDEMIOLOGICAL BOARD

SUBJECT: Review of Medically Related Fatalities

The Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner (OAFME) is charged with conducting scientific forensic investigations for determining the cause and manner of death for military personnel, a vital and essential function for the Military Health System. As of September 2003, approximately 300 fatalities have been associated with Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. While the majority of these fatalities have been combat-related, a significant proportion has been associated with non-hostile activities including accidents, illness, environmental conditions, and exercise or other strenuous activity. The DoD safety community has investigated many, but not all of these fatalities.

To ensure appropriate review of fatalities which are non-combat in nature and not subject to investigation and reporting by current DoD safety regulations, I request the Armed Forces Epidemiological Board (AFEB) work with the OAFME and independently review non-combat fatalities associated with ongoing operations in Iraq. Specifically, the AFEB should 1) review current processes and results of forensic investigations conducted by the OAFME; and 2) assess DoD's current medical surveillance capabilities focusing on early and complete assessment of medically related fatalities as sentinel medical events.

I would like the Board to address this issue at the February 2004 meeting and provide any pertinent recommendations as appropriate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen P. Embrey".

Ellen P. Embrey
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Force Health Protection and Readiness)

cc:
DASD, Clinical and Program Policy
Director, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology