Reviewer's report

Title: The study of reproductive outcome and the health of offspring of UK veterans of the Gulf war: methods and description of the study population

Authors:

Noreen Maconochie (noreen.maconochie@lshtm.ac.uk)
Pat Doyle (pat.doyle@lshtm.ac.uk)
Graham Davies (Graham.Davies@dk.com)
Samantha Lewis (sammylew66@hotmail.com)
Susan Prior (sue.prior@lshtm.ac.uk)
Patrick Sampson (p.sampson@chime.ucl.ac.uk)
Margo Pelerin (peerin@swallow.u-net.com)

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Reviewer: Prof Simon Wessely

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept without revision

It is difficult to have much to say about this paper. It reports the methodology of an extraordinary piece of work - a vast survey of the reproductive outcomes of UK gulf veterans. The team is exceptionally impressive and experienced in this field, as is obvious from the quality of the reporting. Indeed, I could find nothing to criticise in the descriptions of what they did. Clearly the bad news is that despite an enormous investment in time and money, the response rate was still disappointing. The authors do not need me to spell out the problems this causes, since they are more than aware of it. They discuss the various stratagems they used to try and improve it, and also the statistical analyses down to try and convince themselves that it is not as bad as it looks. Nevertheless, they are perfectly honest in saying that recall bias remains an issue. Of course that will become a real issue when they report the actual outcomes, and hence other than describing the problem and methods to partly overcome it, there is not a lot more to say in this paper.

Overall I can see why they wish to give a detailed account of what they have done in this paper, and how it will link in the forthcoming papers on the actual results. As far as this piece of work is concerned, I have no criticisms to make. This is one of the best teams in the world doing this sort of thing, and they do it very well.

Competing interests:

I have received funding from the US DOD and the UK MOD to carry out studies of gulf war illness. I am very familiar with the authors of this paper personally. As I hold them in highest regard I do not regard this as a conflict.