



By Chris Jones

RESEARCH

On the Home Front: BATTLING GULF WAR ILLNESS

It could have been the hundreds of oil wells that were set on fire by troops in the Persian Gulf during the war in 1993 or the use of chemical warfare by the Iraqi government.

Clinical researcher, Marvin Bittner, M.D., however, is one of many who believe something else is causing the fatigue, muscle and joint pain, and problems with memory and thinking, that are associated with Gulf War Veterans Illness.

Thousands of veterans of the Persian Gulf War returned to the United States with symptoms associated with Gulf War Veterans Illness, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Until now, the theories did not warrant enough merit to establish large-scale clinical studies of treatments for the illness. Dr. Bittner and physicians like him are considering the possibility that the symptoms associated with Gulf War Veterans Illness are caused by an organism known as "Mycoplasma fermentans."

"We believe that typically this organism would not affect normal human beings. It is our thought that something has triggered this organism to react in those who served in the Gulf War," said Dr. Bittner, associate professor of internal medicine - infectious disease.

An antibiotic known as doxycycline is being used in a national study supported by the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. It is aimed at finding a cure for this disease and treating those who suffer from it.

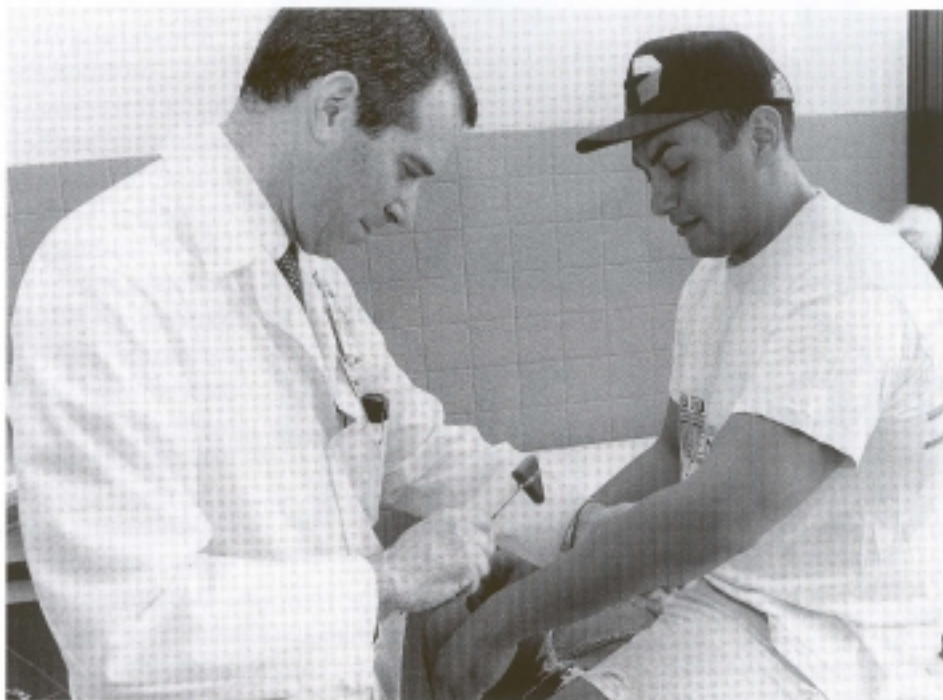
Dr. Bittner was introduced to doxycycline more than 20 years ago when he tested the

antibiotic in his first clinical study.

"This particular drug is exciting, as it potentially can have some wide scale uses," he said.

Dr. Bittner is directing the study site at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Omaha. The national study of Gulf War Illness piques his curiosity personally and professionally.

"This study has great interest for me because it follows my deep philosophy of medicine, which is to ultimately find a solution to the problem, and as an infectious disease specialist, I enjoy the exploration and knowledge gained from such cases," he said.



Dr. Marvin Bittner tests the reflexes of John Sousa, a participant in the Gulf War Illness study being conducted at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Omaha. One symptom of Gulf War Illness is muscle and joint pain.

The study is being conducted at various medical centers throughout the United States, which includes the VAMC site in Omaha. Locally, the goal is to enroll 15 veterans in the study and give some of them the antibiotic once a day for a year. Other participants will receive the placebo.

The study needs more participants. Veterans who are interested in participating or would like more information should call (402) 977-5632. *d*

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