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VA Injecting Addicted Vets With Cocaine

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Veterans Affairs researchers are injecting cocaine into veterans already addicted to the drug in an effort to find treatment for their addiction, according to The Washington Examiner.

Hundreds of veterans appear to have been used as subjects in such studies over the last 10 years, The Examiner reports. The VA has been performing such research for at least 25 years, says Timothy O'Leary, the department's acting director of research and development.

As for the cocaine, about 40 volunteers, mostly veterans, receive the injections at VA labs in Kansas City and San Antonio, O'Leary tells The Examiner.

VA researchers hope that through the research they can develop medicines that prevent the body from absorbing cocaine.

O'Leary says researchers in the drug studies are careful to protect the subjects' health. But The Examiner obtained documents from a 10-year-old study that gave morphine to veterans showing that almost 800 health problems arose, ranging from anorexia to heart tremors.

The studies address an urgent need to find treatments for drug addiction, O'Leary says. The VA estimates that 140,000 veterans are drug addicts.

But critics argue that the experiments violate ethical guidelines on "informed consent." Those rules require that humans in the experiments understand the risks and can decline to participate. But given that the veterans are addicts, it's hard for them to resist.

"How many ways can the government get it wrong?" Cato Institute scholar Tim Lynch asks The Examiner.

Medscape.com reports that 10-12 percent of veterans returning from the Iraq war suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. This affliction often leads to drug addiction.

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