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HOUSE BILL NO. 1474

Offered January 19, 2006

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 32.1-45.1:01, relating to viral hepatitis; certain awareness program required.*

Patrons—Carrico, Cox and Saxman

Referred to Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions

Whereas, hepatitis C, a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus, which is a blood-borne pathogen, may be contracted through exposure to blood during combat and during combat-related emergency medical treatment, blood transfusions, organ and tissue transplants prior to 1992, clotting factors manufactured prior to 1987, long-term kidney dialysis, and the use of injected drugs; and

Whereas, the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) has estimated that veterans have more than a three times higher rate for infection with hepatitis C than the general population; and Vietnam veterans were found to have an even higher rate of infection with hepatitis C than other populations of veterans; and

Whereas, the DVA has screened, identified, and treated more individuals with hepatitis C than any other health care system in the United States or the world; and

Whereas, Virginia is home to a number of military bases and has a large population of veterans; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 32.1-45.1:01 as follows:

§ 32.1-45.1:01. Viral hepatitis; certain awareness program required.

A. *The State Health Commissioner shall establish and administer a viral hepatitis awareness program for the purpose of distributing information to Virginians who are at risk for exposure to viral hepatitis, with emphasis on the risks of viral hepatitis C (HCV) exposure and infection with HCV among Virginia's veterans.*

B. *The information distributed pursuant to the awareness program shall include, but need not be limited to:*

- 1. The risk factors for infection with viral hepatitis, particularly viral HCV among veterans groups;*
- 2. The prevention, etiology, and effects of infection with viral hepatitis, including HCV among veterans groups;*
- 3. The epidemiological profile of viral hepatitis in Virginia, with specific data on HCV among veterans, in so far as possible;*
- 4. The potential for infection with HCV to become a chronic infection without obvious symptoms for many years before the signs of liver disease appear;*
- 5. How the unusually long latency period of HCV can make it difficult to link current symptoms with an infection that may have been contracted years or even decades earlier;*
- 6. The advantages of testing of Virginians at risk for exposure to HCV to determine whether treatment is needed and would be beneficial;*
- 7. On the advantages of Virginians at risk of exposure to viral hepatitis being vaccinated for hepatitis A and B; and*
- 8. On referrals and treatment options, and opportunities for Virginians who believe they are at risk for infection with viral hepatitis, particularly HCV, to obtain medical consultation for screening and treatment purposes.*

C. *For the purposes of the viral hepatitis awareness program, the State Health Commissioner shall utilize, in so far as possible, information available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its publications and on its website as well as data available through Virginia's existing disease surveillance and investigation program.*

D. *The State Health Commissioner shall consult with the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services and may consult with various officials working in veterans hospitals and nursing homes and with various veterans organizations prior to establishing the hepatitis awareness program.*

E. *The information developed for the hepatitis awareness program shall be disseminated to veterans and others by electronic means, as appropriate, through the various military bases, veterans hospitals and nursing homes, and veterans organizations in Virginia. However, upon request, such information shall be made available to the public in hard copy when electronic access is unavailable.*

INTRODUCED

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