Editor's Note

Less than a year ago, the editors of Women’s Health Issues and the Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) Service of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a call for papers reporting the results of original research on topics related to the health and health care of U.S. women veterans and women in the military. The call generated great interest and numerous submissions, many of which are published in this second Supplement of 2011, entitled Health and Health Care of Women Veterans and Women in the Military: Research Informing Evidence-Based Practice and Policy. Co-guest editors Becky Yano, PhD, and Susan Frayne, MD, and an esteemed panel of reviewers made often difficult choices thanks to the quality of the research submitted for review and publication. We are grateful to our expert reviewers for devoting their time to providing constructive feedback to the editors and to the authors who submitted manuscripts for consideration: Lori Bastian, MD, Cynthia Brandt, MD, MPH, Barbara Bokhour, PhD, Brenda Booth, PhD, Sonya Borroto, MD, Beth Cohen, MD, Alison Hamilton, PhD, JoAnn Kirchner, MD, Erin Krebs, MD, Martin Lee, PhD, Kathryn Magruder, PhD, Kristin Mattocks, PhD, Melissa McNeil, MD, MPH, Maureen Murdoch, MD, Ciaran Phibbs, PhD, Gayle Reiber, PhD, Anne Sadler, PhD, RN, Paula Schnurr, PhD, Sarah Scholle, DrPH, Amy Street, PhD, Lori L. Trego, PhD, CMN, Vicia Valenstein, MD, Sally Vernon, PhD, Donna Washington, MD, MPH, Carol Weisman, PhD, and Ellen F.T. Yee, MD. We also would like to thank enormously the VA HSR&D Service, for funding this Supplement (as part of the dissemination goals of the HSR&D-funded VA Women’s Health Research Consortium), and extend special thanks to the VA’s Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group, which oversees health care for women veterans throughout the VA, for providing additional support to expand the Supplement and ensure distribution of copies to VA’s Women Veterans Program Managers nationally and to VA leadership.

This special issue includes articles that exhibit the breadth and depth of research on women’s health in the VA and the military. It is amazing to think that not long ago proportionately few women entered the military and fewer still saw combat. According to analyses by Bean-Mayberry et al. published in this Supplement, today, one in five new recruits is a woman, 15% of active military personnel are women, and women have become the fastest growing group of veterans who are new users of the VA health care system. This shift in the VA user demographics should not be underestimated, because it has important implications for the VA’s ability and capacity to accommodate women’s needs in all aspects of life, whether they are working or retired, suffer from chronic conditions that often are the direct result of their service in theaters of war, or have routine medical needs, all of which require tailored services and programs. The VA, often cited as the U.S. model of a government-funded, government-run health care system, has also made great strides in transforming its ways of delivering care and in investing in monitoring and evaluation, including research that focuses on women’s health. The VA is well-placed to carry out population-based assessments of access and quality of care, and tailoring those to issues that pertain to women’s health. It has electronic information systems in place that collect ongoing patient-level data nationwide, and as a result possesses a wealth of datasets waiting to be mined and analyzed—a researcher’s dream. It also has the benefit of employing a group of excellent women’s health services researchers who are able to produce useful and actionable results that can be the basis of further systemic improvement. The work of many of these researchers is featured in this supplement.

To be published in this Supplement, the research described had to be original health services research conducted in VA settings, or primarily involve women veterans or women in the military. It had to provide high-quality evidence on health and health care delivery issues affecting women veterans, and on interventions designed to improve access to and utilization of high quality care among women veterans. It had to lead to evidence-based recommendations for improving care accessed by women veterans for policymakers, providers, program administrators, researchers, and patients. As our readers will discover, topics covered are varied and address many aspects of women’s health, diseases and conditions, utilization patterns, features of service delivery, and conditions. All articles make contributions to the scientific literature and to the improvement of access, quality of care and outcomes for women veterans and perhaps indirectly for other veterans as well. We are very pleased to have been part of this effort. Enjoy!

In Memoriam: John Peter Markus, Sr., 1924–2010
82nd Airborne Division, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Operation Overlord, Normandy, France (D-Day), recipient of the “Purple Heart”

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