DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL
5109 LEESBURG PIKE
FALLS CHURCH VA 22041-3258

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DASG-ZA

27 OCT 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Reactions to Vaccines

1. During recent Congressional hearings before the House Committee on Government Reform, several individuals, many of them active duty, alleged harm from the anthrax vaccine. All of their case histories are complex and moving. Some statements were made, however, that reflect on the quality of care and empathy of our providers.

2. I appreciate the competing demands facing you in the health care environment and commend you for consistently providing the highest quality of care to the largest client population in the world. Your expertise and dedication are unequaled. Having said that, there is always room for improvement.

3. I request that you reinforce to our medical personnel that some individuals will have reactions to vaccines—the anthrax vaccine among them—some mild, some more pronounced. In every case, we should treat them with the same empathy as, for example, an injury. They deserve a careful work-up and prompt treatment of symptoms.

4. The FDA/CDC Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) is the nation's way of tracking adverse events possibly associated with licensed vaccines. The report of an adverse event to VAERS is not documentation that a vaccine caused the event, only that the event occurred soon after the vaccine was administered. The FDA encourages physicians and other healthcare providers to report serious or unexpected adverse events following vaccination, whether or not they believe the vaccination was the cause of the adverse event. Since it is difficult to distinguish a coincidental event from one truly caused by a vaccine, the VAERS database contains events of both types.

5. AR 40-562, Immunizations and Chemoprophylaxis, 1 Nov 95, sets the **minimum** requirements for submission of a Form VAERS-1: vaccine reactions resulting in hospitalization or time lost from duty (more than 24 hours), or if contaminated or dangerous lots are suspected. In addition, I encourage submission for any event that may be related to a vaccination. If a patient wants to submit a VAERS report, help him

Printed on Recycled Paper

or her submit one. I want to emphasize: submission of a FORM VAERS-1 is not an indictment against a vaccine, it simply facilitates review of temporally associated symptoms and, perhaps more importantly, adds to our safety database on each vaccine.

JAMES B. PEAKE, MD
Lieutenant General
The Surgeon General

DISTRIBUTION:
COMMANDER
NORTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND
GREAT PLAINS REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND
WESTERN REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND
EUROPEAN REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND
PACIFIC REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND