

### TRICARE PHARMACY RATES UPDATE 05

The DoD Beneficiary Advisory Panel (BAP) has placed several additional medications in the third tier formulary, which means they would require a \$22 TRICARE copay instead of the normal \$9 copay for brand-name drugs or \$3 copay for generics. The drugs involved are:

- \* ACE Inhibitors: Univasc, Aceon, Accupril, and Altace (for high blood pressure).
- \* Calcium Channel Blockers: Verelan, Verelan PM, Covera HS, Cardizem LA, Norvasc, DynaCirc, DynaCirc CR, Cardene, and Cardene SR (a different kind of blood pressure drug).
- \* Alpha-blocker: Flomax (for benign prostate enlargement).

### RETIRED USS IOWA HEADED INLAND AFTER SAN FRANCISCO'S ANTIWAR REJECTION

The *USS Iowa* served in battles from World War II to Korea to the Persian Gulf. It transported President Franklin Roosevelt home from the Tehran conference of allied leaders; and, four decades later, suffered one of the nation's most deadly military accidents. Veterans groups and history buffs had hoped that tourists in San Francisco could walk the same teak decks where Sailors dodged Japanese machine-gun fire and fired 16-inch guns that helped win battles across the South Pacific. Instead, it appears that the retired battleship is headed about 80 miles inland to Stockton, a port town on the San Joaquin River. The *Iowa* was towed from Rhode Island to the Bay Area in 2001 in hopes of making Fisherman's Wharf its new homeport. City supervisors, citing local opposition to the Iraq war and the military's stance on gays, declined to take the historic ship.

### GUARD AND RESERVE TAKING CASUALTIES

The National Guard and Reserve are suffering a strikingly higher share of U.S. casualties in Iraq. Reservists have accounted for one-quarter of all U.S. deaths since the Iraq war began, but the proportion has grown over time. It was ten percent for the five weeks it took to topple

Baghdad in the spring of 2003, and 20 percent for 2004 as a whole. For the first nine months of 2005 Reservists accounted for 36 percent of U.S. deaths; and for August and September, it was 56 percent, according to Pentagon figures. The Army National Guard, Army Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserve accounted for more than half of all U.S. deaths in August and in September, the first time that has happened in consecutive months. Casualties in Iraq have shifted toward citizen soldiers as their combat role has grown to historic levels. National Guard officials say their soldiers have been sent into combat in Iraq in numbers not previously seen in modern times.

### SINKING OF SHIP FOR REEF BECOMES A HEADACHE FOR NAVY

The Navy's cost of sinking the retired aircraft carrier *USS Oriskany* as an artificial reef has increased from \$2.8 million to \$12.73 million because of delays in obtaining a permit from the Environmental Protection Agency. The 888-foot long carrier, a combat veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars, would be the largest ship purposely sunk as an artificial reef. Part of the cost escalation has come from towing the *Oriskany* back and forth between Texas and Pensacola, where it is planned for sinking in the Gulf of Mexico about 25 miles offshore. The Navy initially set the sinking for last year; and, then, the date was pushed back to earlier this year. In anticipation of that schedule, the ship was towed to Pensacola in December from Corpus Christi, TX, where it had been partially cleaned of contaminants. When the permitting delays continued into the summer, the carrier was returned to the Navy Reserve fleet facility at Beaumont, TX, to ride out the hurricane season. It had been stored at Beaumont from 1999 through 2004. The target date for sinking now is May 2006.

### ARMY TO LOWER BAR FOR RECRUITS

Facing recruiting shortages brought on by the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army has decided to accept a greater number of recruits who score near the bottom of military aptitude tests. Coming off a recruiting year in which the Army

fell short of its goal of 80,000 active-duty soldiers, the Army announced that it would allow up to four percent of its recruiting class to be Category IV recruits . . . those who scored between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> percentile in the battery of aptitude tests. Previously, the Army allowed no more than two percent of its recruiting class to be from the Category IV level. Department of Defense guidelines do allow up to four percent of each military service's recruiting class to be Category IV.

### MEDICARE PART B PREMIUMS GOING UP

A \$10.30 increase in Medicare Part B will increase the monthly premium from \$78.20 to \$88.50. The new premium reflects an enhanced Medicare, providing seniors and those with disabilities strengthened access to physician services and new preventive benefits.

### MILITARY RETIREE PAY STATEMENT CHANGE

Military retirees who have been receiving two separate checks from DFAS for retired pay and concurrent retired disability pay (CRDP) will see those payments combined into a single check starting in Nov. 2005. Now that CRDP is being incorporated into disabled retirees' pay statements, the statements will show a dollar-for-dollar decrease in the waiver amount and a dollar-for-dollar increase to their taxable retired pay. Unfortunately, DFAS cannot yet show Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) payments on the pay statement. There are plans for this in the future.

### FLU SHOTS

This year, as in the past, much attention is given to the potential spread of bird flu. It's wiser to avoid the flu by getting a flu shot now. Unlike last year, when there was a shortage of flu vaccine, supplies seem plentiful this year; but this should not be a reason to delay getting flu shots. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) strongly recommends that people aged 65 years and older, with or without chronic health conditions; those people of long-term care at home or in resident of long-term care facilities; or people aged two-to-64 years with chronic health conditions should get flu shots now. 📌