Since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, numerous studies have been conducted to determine if an association exists between Agent Orange exposure and certain disabling conditions, specifically cancer. Although a definite causal relationship has not yet been established, sufficient data associate Agent Orange with certain conditions. Because of their advancing age, similar to other baby boomers, Vietnam veterans are at a higher risk of developing malignancies. However, their exposure to Agent Orange may increase their risk for cancer and other associated diseases. This article examines the latest findings of scientific research sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and discusses the importance of well-informed oncology nurses when providing care for patients with cancer exposed to Agent Orange.

**Key Words:** environmental exposure, herbicides

**Epidemiology**

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), an estimated 1,334,100 new cases of cancer in veterans exposed to Agent Orange. The Epidemiology Study was a combination of three studies: the Vietnam Experience Study, the Agent Orange Exposure Study, and the Selected Cancers Study. In 1990, the Selected Cancers Study findings indicated that Vietnam veterans were not at increased risk for developing the five types of cancers studied: soft-tissue sarcoma and other sarcomas, non-Hodgkin’s lymphomas, Hodgkin’s disease, nasopharyngeal cancer, and liver cancer. The study could not conclude whether exposure to Agent Orange was linked with increased risk of cancer (U.S. Veteran Information, 2002).

On the contrary, in 1993, NAS reported that three types of cancer were found to have “sufficient evidence” of an association with herbicidal exposure. They were soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and Hodgkin’s disease. NAS also grouped the types of cancers studied into these categories: limited or suggestive evidence, inadequate or insufficient evidence, and limited or suggestive evidence of no association between certain types of cancers and exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam (U.S. Veteran Information, 2002). These are listed in Figure 1.