

# Stars & Stripes

## Letters to the Editor for Wednesday, March 18, 2009

<http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=125&article=61421>

### **Lariam can do real harm**

Many of us Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans who now suffer from the permanent side effects of Lariam toxicity read with great angst "Anti-Malaria drug is limited due to risks" (article, March 6).

[University of Maryland medical professor] Dr. Chris Plowe's labeling such damage as urban myth is outdated and dismisses the real harm this drug can do. Recent research at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research finds Lariam a powerful neurotoxin capable of damaging the brain and central nervous system.

Dr. Plowe's comments contradict those made by Dr. Robert Edelman, travelers' health clinic director at the University of Maryland. An article that appeared in The Washington Post in 2000 quotes Edelman as saying: "I don't like using mefloquine (Lariam) [on patients] if I can avoid it. I'm not happy with the side effects." The article also said Dr. Edelman "estimates as many as one in four of his patients have a reaction — insomnia, dizziness, feeling lightheaded or nauseated, if not something worse." "The problem is, most patients aren't even aware of these side effects unless you tell them," Dr. Edelman told The Post.

Double-blind research trials find the true rate of neuropsychiatric side effects from Lariam to be 29 percent to 42 percent (British Medical Journal, Patricia Schlagenhauf, 2004).

The term "urban myth" also sends a cavalier message to the medics and corpsmen who receive no training on mefloquine and who hand out this drug to the troops.

The Army surgeon general didn't order a switch to doxycycline without cause. Discounting the order's importance disrespects him and the troops.

Cmdr. Bill Manofsky (retired)  
China Lake, Calif.