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GOVERNMENT

Pentagon chief orders review of mental diagnoses

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Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said Wednesday he has ordered all branches of the military to conduct an extensive review of mental health diagnoses amid criticism of how the services treat the men and women suffering the invisible wounds of the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Under questioning from a Senate panel on Wednesday, Panetta disclosed that he had asked the Air Force and Navy, which includes the Marine Corps, to follow the lead of the Army in launching an independent study of how it evaluates soldiers with possible post-traumatic stress disorder. Panetta's answer marked the first time that the Pentagon chief had said publicly that he had requested the review by all the services.

The Army review was prompted in part by reports that the forensic psychiatry unit at Madigan Army Medical Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state may have reversed PTSD diagnoses based on the expense of providing care and benefits to members of the military. In recent years, the number of PTSD and traumatic brain injury cases has increased significantly as the Iraq war drew to a close after nearly a decade and the Afghanistan conflict enters its second decade.

At the Senate hearing, Democratic Sen. Patty Mur-



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Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey listens at right as Defense Secretary Leon Panetta testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday before the Senate Defense subcommittee hearing on the the Defense Department's fiscal 2013 budget.

ray of Washington state reminded Panetta that the Army was conducting a sweeping review and asked why the Defense Department had not taken the lead.

"Senator, we are. What I've asked is the other service chiefs to implement the same approach that the Army's taken here," Panetta responded. The Pentagon chief said he was not satisfied with the military's handling of the cases and promised it would do better. "There are still huge gaps in terms of the differences in terms of how they approach these cases and how they diagnose the cases and how they deal with them, and

frankly, that's a whole area we have to do much better on," Panetta said.

The Pentagon has asked Jonathan Woodson, the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, to oversee the review. The study will cover mental health diagnoses dating to 2001. Murray described the pain of talking to a soldier who was diagnosed with PTSD. "His family was working with him, and then when he went to the disability evaluation system, was told he was a liar or malingerer. He was taken out of it and he went out in the civilian world not being treated. That's a horrendous offense," said Murray, a

member of the Appropriations Committee who also heads the Veterans Affairs Committee.

Earlier this year, Murray said that more than 40 percent of the cases since 2007 that involved candidates for retirement had been overturned. She said that of the 1,680 patients screened at Madigan, more than 690 had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The psychiatric team there reversed more than 290 of those diagnoses. Murray said last month that more than 100 service members had their PTSD diagnosis returned after a review at the facility at Madigan.