



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

June 20, 2008

Dear Veteran:

Because you are a veteran who has been prescribed varenicline (Chantix®) to help you quit smoking, you may be concerned about recent news articles relating to the medication and its possible side effects. Let me reassure you that varenicline is approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to help patients who have made the right decision to quit smoking.

The use of varenicline, like many other medications approved by the FDA, can **in some cases** result in unwanted side effects. For example, we ask you to use caution when driving or operating machinery until you know how this medication will affect you. More recently reported side effects include changes in mood, changes in behavior, and thoughts of suicide. It is very important that you contact your Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care provider if you experience any changes in mood or behavior or thoughts of suicide.

In addition, if you ever experience an emotional crisis and need to talk to someone, or if you are thinking about harming yourself, qualified and caring VA professionals are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call the National Suicide Prevention toll-free hotline number, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and you will be immediately connected to someone who can help.

If you are at all concerned about your use of varenicline, we encourage you to speak to your VA health care provider. If you feel uncomfortable about continuing to use this medication, we will find another way to help you quit smoking. All you need to do is ask.

Remember that cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of disease and premature death in the United States, with more than 430,000 American deaths annually associated with smoking. Quitting smoking can lead to many health benefits, including a reduction in the chance of having lung disease, heart disease, or getting cancer. It's one of the very best things you can do to improve your chances of living a longer, fuller life. You are doing the right thing by quitting—not only for yourself, but for those around you.

Thank you for taking this important step, and remember: VA is proud to serve you, and all of our Nation's veterans.

Sincerely yours.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James B. Peake". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

James B. Peake, M.D.