

**STATEMENT OF THE GREATER NEW YORK HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
ON
HOSPITALS' RESPONSE TO MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE
WORLD TRADE CENTER DISASTER
AT A
PUBLIC HEARING
ON
NEW YORK CITY'S MENTAL HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE WORLD TRADE
CENTER DISASTER: RESOURCES AND NEEDS
HELD BY
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S SUBCOMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL
RETARDATION, ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG SERVICES
NOVEMBER 8, 2001**

Good morning. I am Patricia O'Brien, Ph.D., R.N., Associate Vice President for Regulatory and Professional Affairs for Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA), and I am a licensed psychiatric nurse practitioner with certification in adult psychiatric-mental health nursing. GNYHA represents 200 not-for-profit hospitals and continuing care facilities, both voluntary and public, in the metropolitan New York area. GNYHA's members provide state-of-the-art, acute tertiary care as well as post-acute and chronic care services, and often serve as the principal source of primary care in their service areas. GNYHA's hospital members are the largest providers of psychiatric-mental health services in the downstate area, providing services that include inpatient, outpatient, crisis intervention, home care, and long-term residential care. In addition to providing health care, GNYHA members provide their communities with needed social services, employment, and community and urban development.

The fact that GNYHA member institutions are integral parts of the communities they serve was evident in their response to the attack on the World Trade Center, September 11, 2001. GNYHA has been asked specifically to provide information to the City Council's Subcommittee regarding the ways that its member hospitals responded to meet the mental health needs of their communities since September 11. On behalf of the members of GNYHA, I wish to express my appreciation for the opportunity to share this information with you, and I hope that the information will assist the Subcommittee in its evaluation of the City's mental health infrastructure.

GNYHA Member Response to the WTC Attack

GNYHA has a standing Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Committee and members of that committee contributed information for this testimony regarding the mental health and crisis services that they provided, and continue to provide, in their communities since the attack on the WTC.

NYU Downtown Hospital, which is located within blocks of the WTC, became a place of refuge for residents of the community as well as for those evacuated from the WTC and other buildings in the area. In the midst of their own anxieties, given their proximity to the disaster, the staff at NYU Downtown Hospital provided support and reassurance to others. Since September 11, NYU Downtown Hospital has retained the services of various professionals to provide counseling and educational services free of charge to the community, including a large Chinese community; hospital employees; residents and small businesses; and the corporate community.

The next closest hospital to the WTC site is **St. Vincents Catholic Medical Centers (SVCMC) of New York's** Manhattan Campus, which, in addition to being a certified trauma center, is a licensed provider of psychiatric services. After the initial wave of casualties was brought into the hospital on September 11 and 12, and emergency and medical trauma care was provided, the focus of the response

switched from medical first aid to psychological first aid. SVCMC's Behavioral Health Services has provided a great deal of assistance to the injured, the rescue workers, family members and friends of those missing and injured, and their staff, who were affected by this event in Manhattan, as well as at its hospitals in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and Westchester.

- Manhattan's Family Resource Center saw an estimated 6,000 people in the first 24 hours after the attack and saw more than 500 additional people during September.
- Staten Island had 4 behavioral health staff members stationed at Richmond County Borough Hall continuously over the initial weekend following the attack for crisis counseling, and another 12-15 social workers were stationed all over Staten Island.
- In Manhattan, ongoing support groups have been established for community members affected by the disaster, and its aftermath.
- Crisis hotlines in Manhattan, Staten Island and Westchester took hundreds of calls from distraught relatives seeking news about family members, from individuals offering to help, and from persons requiring crisis counseling.
- Staten Island's evaluation and referral service saw 80 people and the mobile crisis unit did 15 home visits between September 11 and September 25. They have also serviced several fire companies. SVCMC continues to respond to these needs, as they arise.
- SVCMC's employee assistance program has provided counseling and support to employees affected by the tragedy and has assisted in the overall grief counseling services for rescue workers and families.
- SVCMC Behavioral Health Services has responded to approximately 50 requests from companies in Staten Island, Manhattan, Long Island and elsewhere for informational sessions, crisis counseling, and other assistance in coping with the after-effects of the tragedy.
- Manhattan child and adolescent clinicians are working closely with about 10 schools in Southern Manhattan to help school children and staff to deal with the aftermath of the WTC attack. They are working closely with District 2 to provide debriefings and counseling for staff and students of the schools that are so close to the WTC.
- SVCMC is assisting the FDNY Counseling Services. This includes group sessions for firefighters in firehouses and individual counseling for firefighters. This work will be ongoing.
- SVCMC has provided on site services in senior residences and other locations in proximity to the World Trade Center site.

At nearby **Cabrini Medical Center** immediate triage and screening was provided for all patients who were brought to the hospital's Emergency Room. The hospital provided on-site counseling services for victims and emergency workers at the Police Academy, which was set up as an interim City command center when 7 WTC was evacuated. Psychiatrists and social workers assisted several hundred families who came to the hospital seeking missing relatives or friends, and operated a walk-in crisis clinic off-site, at 2nd Avenue and 8th Street. Psychiatrists from the hospital volunteered their clinical services at Ground Zero and at the City's Family Assistance Center at Pier 94. Daily free support groups were held for staff, victims, or family members and educational programs were developed for the hospital's clinical and administrative leadership to assist them in recognizing and supporting staff in need of counseling or assistance.

Beth Israel Medical Center, also located in lower Manhattan, in addition to providing inpatient psychiatric hospitalization for some survivors of the WTC attack, also offered a range of community-based mental health services, including:

- Crisis counseling and debriefing at Ground Zero for rescue workers;
- Assistance and support of individuals evacuated from buildings near Ground Zero;

- Walk-in crisis counseling, psychotherapy, and pharmacotherapy services for survivors, family members and other persons affected by the disaster; and
- Volunteer counseling and evaluation services for EMT workers, and for victims, family members and friends of victims at Pier 94 and the Armory.

In addition, Beth Israel Medical Center closed an inpatient psychiatric unit to make room for acute admissions of anticipated trauma patients, which, sadly, did not materialize.

The New York City Health and Hospital Corporation's (HHC) facilities in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, and Queens, also members of GNYHA, treated numerous persons in need of evaluation, crisis-counseling, and psychiatric treatment in the days and weeks following the WTC disaster. HHC has indicated to GNYHA that it is submitting testimony to the Council Subcommittee at today's hearing.

On September 11, the **Mount Sinai Hospital** Departments of Psychiatry and Social Work set up a hotline and a walk-in counseling service for people looking for family members and/or people directly affected by the WTC disaster. The hotline operated for two weeks, around the clock, utilizing eight phone lines. Medical students eventually took over the hotline from 11PM to 7AM, and clinicians continue to see people directly or indirectly affected by the WTC disaster, both at the hospital and at community sites. Telephone counseling was a way of reaching persons who felt too frightened to leave their homes. The Child Psychiatry staff continues to provide counseling services for students, teachers, and parents in public and private schools in the community, for senior centers, and for neighborhood religious groups, including the mosque on East 96th Street.

Counseling services were provided for staff and medical students. Psychiatrists, social workers, and psychiatric resident physicians were routinely deployed to the armory and Pier 94 to assist families to cope with the crisis. Mt. Sinai's voluntary faculty volunteered services at the Pier, and with various companies that requested assistance.

The community-based Psychiatric Mobile Crisis Team at the Columbia Presbyterian Campus of New York Presbyterian Hospital saw people in their community and, in addition, became an integral part of the City Department of Mental Health efforts in the respective armories. Psychiatrists, psychologists, residents, psychology interns, social workers, nurses and administrative staff have all volunteered their time.

New York Presbyterian Hospital has also set up a Crisis Hotline that is available 24 hours a day and a Crisis Evaluation Center that operates from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., 7 days a week, providing crisis and grief counseling, as well as education about acute stress reactions. When indicated, clients are referred to the other services within the system, such as the Intensive Outpatient Program, Spanish Speaking Clinics, Psychiatric Emergency Room and Inpatient Units. Child Psychiatry has responded to requests from ten schools and deployed extra staff when children returned back to school last week.

New York Presbyterian Hospital's outreach efforts include counseling for Columbia University students and faculty, and the establishment of information tables at the hospital. It is estimated that approximately 200 staff and visitors have left with handouts and referrals numbers for further assistance. The hospital is also responding to requests from various companies and organizations to provide on-site group counseling and follow-up counseling to their employees.

Other Manhattan hospitals provided similar crisis services. In addition to operating crisis services through their mental health clinics and Emergency Rooms, **St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center** is currently running three (two in English, one in Spanish) crisis-counseling groups at their Adult Outpatient Program located at the Roosevelt Hospital site. Hospital staff volunteered with the American Red Cross and at the City's Family Assistance Center, and group counseling sessions have been provided for employees of the City University of New York.

Similarly, **Lenox Hill Hospital** expanded its crisis services and established free support groups and provided a range of outreach services. A "drop-in" outpatient crisis center provided evaluation services, and six crisis-counseling sessions were made available. Services have been offered free or at reduced rates.

Crisis-counseling and psychiatric services were also available at **NYU Hospitals Center** and **North General Hospital in Manhattan**.

The Visiting Nurse Service (VNS) of New York has been working hard to respond as needed to the events of September 11th. The agency provided 18 debriefing sessions to the local schools, community groups, and businesses through Mobile Crisis Teams in Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx. VNS has been doing home visits with individuals and families directly affected by the disaster, and, at the request of the State Office of Mental Health, has established a hotline in the Bronx for children and families impacted by the WTC disaster. The hotline was functioning within 24 hours of the Towers' collapse and continues to operate as a consultation and referral service. To date, 19 staff members have spent a total of 402 hours at the City's Family Assistance Center providing mental health services.

A large number of victims of the WTC disaster, including firefighters, were residents of Staten Island. **Staten Island University Hospital** has been collaborating with other hospitals and agencies to coordinate crisis services for the community's residents. Specific initiatives of Staten Island University Hospital are:

- SIUH has been sending professionals into the public school system upon the request of Staten Island District 31 since 10/22/01. Education, crisis counseling, and referral for continued service are being provided to 6 public and intermediate schools, once a week, for a full day, per school.
- SIUH put notices in local the newspaper to inform the population that crisis counseling is available to all individuals affected by the WTC disaster on a walk-in basis. This has produced 100 walk-in visits from 9/11/01 to 10/26/01. Two crisis visits were offered to each individual with follow-up arranged if needed. Overtime hours were generated for professional staff in order to meet the need at all three hospital sites.
- Group crisis counseling was made available two evenings per week for rescue workers and their families.
- A representative of SIUH has met with the Staten Island Borough President, and an informational booklet is being created for the community.

SIUH and the Staten Island Advance are arranging an Evening of Remembrance, Prayer, and Expression at the Hilton Hotel on Staten Island on November 13, 2001 for all those affected by the disaster.

Since September 11, 2001, **St. John's Episcopal Hospital**, South Shore, in Far Rockaway, under the aegis of its Departments of Psychiatry, Human Services and Pastoral Care, has made crisis and grief counseling services available to hospital inpatients and outpatients, staff, firefighters, police officers and rescue workers on a 24-hour a day basis. Advertisements were published in local journals and newspapers offering these services free of charge to anyone affected by the WTC disaster. Staff at the hospital have participated with other mental health and social service agencies on the Rockaway Peninsula in forming outreach teams to meet with residents in houses of worship, community centers, schools, supermarkets and local gathering places. In excess of 20 clinicians have volunteered time at Piers 94 and 92, Center Street and Ground Zero. Applications have been made to Project Liberty and other FEMA programs. The above efforts will continue as long as there is need.

The Department of Psychiatry at **SUNY-Downstate** provided crisis counseling and crisis screening,

both at Pier 94 and at the University Hospital of Brooklyn. The hospital also provides emergency room assessments, inpatient hospitalization, short-term crisis therapy, psychotherapy, and medication management.

Maimonides Hospital Community Mental Health Center Staff staffed a 24-hour, 7-day a week hotline for four weeks starting September 11th. In addition, the walk-in clinic hours were expanded and weekend hours added for the first two weeks after the disaster. Maimonides Hospital offered an initial visit and up to six "crisis visits" at no cost for persons without insurance coverage. During the weeks after the attack, the hospital provided additional attending psychiatrist coverage for emergency services.

Staff from the hospital's Child and Adolescent Outpatient Services (CAOS) provided consultation and outreach services to the New York City Board of Education and presented informational programs to more than 1400 children at the local Intermediate School. In addition, staff presented information on emotional responses to crisis and grief to children and family members of police and firefighters at a local community meeting. The hospital has also provided interdenominational services and counseling for hospital staff.

Long Island College Hospital, located just across the river from the WTC, provided supportive and therapeutic services for the community and for its staff, in the form of both group and individual sessions. In addition to providing counseling at the City's Family Assistance Center, the hospital responded to requests for counseling services from emergency and uniformed workers, including requests from local firehouses. The hospital's Department of Psychiatry has provided office space and support services to the employee assistance program staff of the Building Services Union, 32-BJ, to begin outreach to its members. Three thousand of the union members live in Brooklyn, and 1200 members worked in the WTC.

Brooklyn residents also received walk-in crisis evaluation and counseling services at **New York Methodist Hospital, Brookdale Hospital, Brooklyn Hospital, Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center** and **Interfaith Medical Center**. A range of counseling services for individuals, groups, and families were available in Queens at **Mount Sinai Hospital of Queens, New York Hospital Medical Center of Queens, and Jamaica Hospital**. In the Bronx, **St. Barnabas Hospital** provided multi-lingual outpatient services; **Montefiore Medical Center** developed a clinic to treat adults and children who were experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder; **Our Lady of Mercy Medical Center** provided support and grief counseling; **Bronx Lebanon Hospital**, provide individual and group counseling at the hospital's outpatient center, while staff from its mobile crisis unit treated people unable to come to the hospital. **The Bronx Veteran's Administration Medical Center** and **Calvary Hospital** also provided bereavement counseling and support services for individuals and families.

In addition to providing hospital-based mental health and crisis services, **North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System** has provided extensive education and counseling services in the community, including the City's Family Assistance Center, Battery Park City, the Port Authority Crisis Counseling Center, and local schools.

GNYHA member hospitals in the counties surrounding New York City also responded to the needs of the members of their communities affected by the disaster. On September 11, **The Westchester Medical Center** discharged 10 patients from its Behavioral Health Center in anticipation of admitting survivors to the medical center's burn and trauma services. Professional staff members worked with the American Red Cross in Westchester County to provide assessment and counseling services. The Behavioral Health Center's Mobile Crisis Team operated the County's mental health telephone referral service, providing information, support, and assessment services to callers. The Outpatient Mental Health Clinic provided both individual and group treatment at no charge. The hospital sent a Disaster

Medical Assistance Team, which included a Psychiatric Clinical Nurse Specialist, to Ground Zero and the team continues to provide services in the city.

Farther north, at **Benedictine Hospital** in Kingston, New York, the demand for mental health services was less, but, uncertain as to what the needs would be, the hospital doubled the number of staff in the Psychiatric Emergency Room for two days. The hospital also provided public information and was available as part of a crisis response team.

Additional Mental Health Services

Following the attack on the WTC, GNYHA compiled a list of the crisis and mental health services that were being offered by its members and made this list available on its web page, www.gnyha.org. The list was also posted on New York City's official web page, www.nyc.gov, along with other services to assist survivors, families and friends of victims. The list of services is attached as an addendum to this testimony.

GNYHA, at the request of the New York City Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services (DMH), made copies of its member directory available for use at the City's crisis counseling centers.

On September 25, 2001, GNYHA hosted a briefing by the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) and DMH regarding the Federal Emergency Management Agency's funding for crisis counseling.

GNYHA, in response to a request from DMH, developed a survey instrument and has been collecting information regarding the utilization of psychiatric crisis services since September 11, as well as the number of inpatient psychiatric admissions related to the disaster. GNYHA is in the process of analyzing the data and will prepare a summary report.

Lessons Learned

As a result of the events of September 11, providers of mental health services and government agencies were called upon to deal with a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The crisis continues with the increased concerns over the risk of infection from anthrax and other biological agents. On all fronts, the response has been admirable. The new reality is that we must be ready for future disasters. The recent experiences will provide the basis for building a comprehensive plan for the provision of mental health services at the time of any future disasters.

The networks that were already established in the mental health provider community were invaluable in communicating essential information during the past weeks. Communication channels could be formalized and disaster response teams identified. Local, State, and Federal mental health agencies must coordinate with the City's Office of Emergency Management and make information available on a regular basis to providers. The immediate need for crisis counseling and public education requires that educational materials for staff and the public be always available in anticipation of a need.

There is a need to coordinate all medical services, including mental health services, provided by volunteer agencies and individual volunteers. Hospitals were inundated with volunteers and there have been questions raised regarding legal and regulatory requirements that must be met before enlisting the services of volunteers. GNYHA recommends that all volunteer assistance be centrally coordinated. This would help to ensure that requests for staff to provide services at the City's emergency assistance centers are rotated in an equitable manner among providers and that requests for services do not exceed the demand. Issues related to credentialing and malpractice insurance for clinicians who provide services under emergency circumstances at the request of the City need to be clarified.

The financial impact of the disaster on hospitals has been severe. As indicated in the information on the

hospitals' responses to the disaster, beds were closed; staff were deployed to City crisis centers, and counseling was provided free of charge or at reduced rates. It appears that the Federal guidelines for crisis counseling after a disaster will not compensate providers for some of these losses. Information regarding the Federal guidelines for reimbursement was not made available to providers until five weeks after the terrorist attack. To date, questions remain regarding eligibility for FEMA funds. Several hospital providers have indicated that the fee-for-service rates under the City's Project Liberty, the program for providing crisis counseling after October 21, 2001, will not cover the costs of providing services. NYC hospitals already had some of the lowest operating margins in the country. The financial losses associated with the WTC disaster increase their vulnerability. Some hospitals will not be able to afford to participate in Project Liberty.

Going Forward

It is difficult to estimate the volume or type of mental health services that will be needed to assist residents of New York City to recover from the events of September 11. Past disasters have resulted in increased rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, lost productivity, domestic violence, substance abuse, and stress-related illnesses. Hospital-based providers of mental health services are in the unique position to provide a continuum of services, including medication management, necessary to effectively diagnose and treat these conditions. GNYHA has concerns, however, that New York's policy planners are minimizing the need for professional mental health services. Research from Oklahoma City showed that non-professional crisis-counselors underestimated the seriousness of the symptoms they were seeing, thus delaying mental health treatment and recovery for those in need. We must be sure that there is adequate funding and support for mental health treatment in New York City.

We do know that mental health services were already stretched to capacity before the WTC disaster. Patients already were waiting in inpatient settings because appropriate alternate levels of services were not available. Before September 11, GNYHA had been discussing with DMH the extended hospital stays related to a lack of community-based services. The development of outpatient services has been repeatedly thwarted by the State's refusal to approve new services if they will expand Medicaid costs. There is additional concern that treatment for mental illnesses related to the disaster will be limited in some cases by restrictions on mental health insurance benefits.

The current crisis demands that the State and City provide meaningful data on the adequacy of mental health and substance abuse services. The time is right to reevaluate the State's regulatory restriction that holds mental health services to a standard of Medicaid neutrality and to seek legislative solutions to ensure that mental health and substance abuse services achieve parity with other health services when it comes to insurance coverage. It is imperative that the Federal funds designated to support mental health services be made available to hospitals in a way that facilitates the provision of needed services. Financially vulnerable hospitals already absorb the costs of providing care to the uninsured. It is unclear that hospitals can absorb the additional financial burden of providing mental health and substance abuse treatment for persons affected by the WTC disaster, if reimbursement is not available or does not cover costs. Because hospital providers are an integral part of the City's mental health infrastructure, and because they have first-hand knowledge of the needs of the communities they serve, it is essential that the State and City mental health agencies collaborate with providers of mental health services regarding the planning and development of service plans.

GNYHA's providers of mental health services can be proud of their response to the current public health crisis, and they look forward to working in a supportive and collaborative manner with the State and City mental health agencies.