

Testimony

of

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before

Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Hearing on

“Gulf Coast Recovery – An Examination of Claims Administration and Social Services
in the Aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill”

January 27, 2011

Washington, D.C.

Release on Delivery

Good afternoon Chairman Landrieu and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Eric B. Broderick, D.D.S., M.P.H., Deputy Administrator of the Substance Abuse And Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Assistant Surgeon General.

I'm pleased to have this time to share with you a few highlights of SAMHSA's efforts and important role in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill recovery response. I am joining you today on behalf of SAMHSA Administrator Pamela J. Hyde, who is unable to attend the hearing, yet has been very involved with SAMHSA's role in the oil spill response.

Administrator Hyde attended several public forums with Surgeon General Dr. Regina M. Benjamin in areas of the Gulf affected by the disaster, and remains deeply committed to serving the region's behavioral health needs.

As part of HHS, SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities. Behavioral health is an essential part of health. Prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover from mental and substance use disorders.

Traumatic events such as the Deepwater oil spill place a heavy burden on individuals, families, and communities, and create challenges for all public institutions and service systems—especially the behavioral health system.

SAMHSA and the behavioral health community know that disasters often precipitate mental and substance use disorders, which can be triggered when hope seems gone, security is threatened and lives and property are lost. Addressing these behavioral health needs is critical to the recovery of the individuals, families and communities affected by

the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and efforts will be necessary for years to come. With appropriate support and intervention, people can overcome adversity and move forward. As part of a coordinated Department of Health and Human Services response, we at SAMHSA worked to help ensure that the immediate behavioral health needs of affected individuals were addressed in the immediate aftermath of the oil spill, and will continue to address these evolving needs over time.

State reports show increased behavioral health needs in the Gulf region in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. These reports document an increase in the incidence of psychiatric disorders, including anxiety and depression, an increase in the incidence of substance abuse and dependence, higher rates of suicide, and increased rate of familial breakdown, including domestic violence. These outcomes, while troubling, were not unexpected. These increased behavioral health needs are similar to those observed after Katrina as well as after the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 (Psychological Impacts of Oil Spills: The Exxon Valdez Oil Disaster, Lawrence A. Palinkas, Ph.D.)

The current situation in the Gulf is exacerbated by the fact that it occurred in the same region impacted by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina in 2005. The experience of more than one traumatic event (e.g., flood, hurricane, fire, oil spill) is known as re-traumatization. Studies suggest that experiencing trauma heightens vulnerability to other traumatic events. With these disasters occurring in the same region within a five-year period, the people of the Gulf are at increased risk of facing even greater difficulty due to repeated trauma. (After the Crisis Initiative: Healing from Trauma after Disasters Resource Paper: Trauma and Retraumatization , Nina Kammerer and Ruta Mazelis)

SAMHSA has been engaged in supporting the impacted States since the day after the spill. We have provided technical support and assistance to States to assess and meet the mental health needs and related substance abuse concerns of affected communities.

SAMHSA has been in contact with State officials, assessing needs and helping States formulate response plans, including the development of a shared template to gather information, assess and address emergent needs, and provided technical assistance to States in their request for funds from BP for behavioral health services. Moreover, SAMHSA immediately began coordinating with disaster relief officials, public health authorities, and behavioral health service providers in each of the affected States:

Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Texas.

In addition, SAMHSA immediately began making relevant and useful information available on the Agency's website. The SAMHSA website is a comprehensive resource for information on behavioral health resources and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. An online annotated bibliography continues to provide an extensive list of sources of information. The SAMHSA website also provides links to dozens of Federal agencies and other organizations involved in the response as well as brief descriptions of what can be found on the sites.

At the request of HHS Secretary Sebelius, SAMHSA Administrator Hyde, and multiple Gulf Coast States, BP paid \$52 million to fund mental health and substance abuse support services. Funding went to SAMHSA and the four States most affected in the area:

Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

Of this \$52 million, SAMHSA received \$10 million to launch a toll-free crisis counseling hotline for residents of the affected States, develop behavioral health educational materials for public health information, and conduct surveillance of ongoing behavioral health needs for individuals affected by the oil spill.

SAMHSA created and successfully launched the Oil Spill Distress Helpline (1-800-985-5990). This toll-free helpline provides information, support, and counseling for those affected by the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

SAMHSA has also undertaken an extensive regional public education campaign designed to raise awareness of the potential behavioral health impacts of the spill, and to connect those in need to available services. SAMHSA has assisted in the coordination of local and regional outreach activities to promote awareness of the hotline number. We have also disseminated public education and outreach materials on behavioral health among residents in affected areas, including information about recognizing signs and symptoms of distress and self-management techniques. We have posted a number of resources on our website, including tip sheets on topics such as grief, stress management, and support for response workers, as well as consumer-friendly information regarding news and events related to recovery and resilience-building efforts. We have also developed and distributed television, radio, and print public service announcements

In addition to overseeing the \$10 million BP paid to fund behavioral health efforts in the region, SAMHSA has coordinated with HHS partners including the Office of the

Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Administration for Children and Families, and the Surgeon General, to support their efforts related to the oil spill. Notably, through an intra-agency agreement, SAMHSA is working closely with the CDC to conduct a telephone survey in selected Gulf coast counties affected by the oil spill. The Gulf States Population Survey is designed to monitor the mental and behavioral health status of this affected population and will be conducted monthly for a one-year period, from December 15, 2010 to December 14, 2011. The survey questionnaire was developed by CDC in partnership with SAMHSA and State public health and mental health departments from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida where the survey is being conducted.

In addition, SAMHSA is working with CDC to expand the dissemination of public health information to communities in the Gulf affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. SAMHSA's Facebook and Twitter sites posted relevant messages and updates daily not only on SAMHSA's own content on behavioral health messages, but also related content from other Federal agencies working in the area.

Additionally, SAMHSA has recently announced a total of \$648,404 in SAMHSA grants to Gulf Coast States to augment State surveillance infrastructure to permit the timely distribution of behavioral health care and other social services to people affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. To date, funding to each State includes \$162,500 to Louisiana; \$161,404 to Florida; \$162,500 to Alabama; and, \$162,000 to Mississippi through SAMHSA's Emergency Response Grant program.

SAMHSA's efforts represent only part of the Federal Government's comprehensive response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Despite many hardships, people in the Gulf are doing their best to stay connected with friends and with family, take care of themselves, and help their neighbors. Their resilience is phenomenal. Yet history tells us that the emotional impact of the devastating losses experienced by individuals and families as a result of the oil spill will be ongoing, and we remain committed to helping States address the mental health and substance abuse needs of Gulf Coast residents stemming from this disaster.. As such, the Oil Spill Distress Line will be operational through 2011, PSA's and informational websites will continue to be updated and disseminated, surveillance will continue and coordination with state and voluntary service providers will persist until such time as indicators signal they are no longer being used.

Now that the immediate response phase has come to a close, we are shifting our focus to the long-term recovery needs of Gulf coast residents as they work to rebuild their lives. Chairman Landrieu and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.