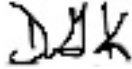




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From: Dr. Dean G. Kilpatrick, Ph.D.   
Director, National Crime Victims Research & Treatment Center  
Director, National Mass Violence and Victimization Resource Center

Date: November 12, 2018

It is my understanding that the Government of Norway is considering a proposal to administratively relocate the Norwegian Center on Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) from its current position as a part of the University of Oslo to the Public Health Institute (FHI). This disturbing news was the focus of considerable discussion among world leaders of the traumatic stress field at the recent International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. This information was particularly distressing to me because I am familiar with the outstanding international reputation the NKVTS has in the traumatic stress field, have worked closely with numerous faculty members and students at the NKVTS on research projects, and have had the opportunity to observe the quality, skill, and leadership qualities of senior NKVTS faculty members due to my long involvement with ISTSS as a Board Member, Treasurer, President, and Editor-In-Chief of the Journal of Traumatic Stress.

I should also note that my perspective on this matter is informed by my experience in having established and served as Director of the National Crime Victim Research and Treatment Center (NCVRTC) at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina USA that was founded in 1977. Although originally focusing exclusively on crime victims, our center has expanded its focus to include other types of traumatic events such as natural disasters, hate crimes, and terrorist attacks. Our mission includes trauma-based research, education, clinical service delivery, and public policy consultation, and we have obtained over \$80 million in extramural funding for our work. We also were selected in 2017 by the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime in a competitive application process to establish the National Mass Violence and Victimization Resource Center via a three year \$18 million grant. My running these two large centers has given me a somewhat unique perspective on what it takes to make a traumatic stress center successful and keep it that way.

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the NKVTS is viewed internationally as one of the best and most productive centers in the world addressing traumatic stress issues. In my view, one key to its success is that it is housed in a university as opposed to some other government agency or bureau that lacks a primary academic mission of research and teaching. Why is being housed in an institution with an academic mission important? First, research is key to being able to answer fundamental epidemiological questions about the scope, nature, and mental/physical health consequences of exposure to violent crime and other traumatic events. Second, research is key for being able answer questions

about risk and protective factors that influence who develops physical/mental health problems following exposure to violence and other potentially traumatic events. Third, research can answer questions about which treatments work for whom, the best ways to train mental health professionals in use of evidence-based treatments, and how to disseminate this information throughout the healthcare professionals. Fourth, having a training mission is extraordinarily important because of the need to the need to train new traumatic stress researchers. Fifth, there is a synergy that comes from having a center in which researchers, clinicians, and teachers are co-located. This ensures that teaching and clinical work are informed by up-to-date research and that the research is more clinically relevant.

Another important consideration is that the NKVTS is multidisciplinary, and its portfolio cuts across several subject areas that include child abuse/child welfare, violent crime/sexual assault, terrorism, mental health, and public health. Consequently, its grant funding has come from several different agencies/ministries. The breadth of its portfolio and activities means that it cannot be easily categorized as fitting well under a ministry with an important but narrower mission. My understanding is that the NKVTS has received funding from several ministries in the past including the Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, and the Ministry of Child and Equality. It is not unusual at all for a university-based center with a broad range of interests and expertise to receive grants from different ministries. However, placing the NKVTS under the Public Health Institute might have the unintended consequence of making other ministries less willing to provide grant or other funding to the NKVTS because of a perception that it is now more narrowly focused on public health issues to the exclusion of child abuse, violent crime, and terrorism. It is also inevitable that placing the NKVTS in a public health Institute would narrow its current interdisciplinary focus which is one of its real strengths. However, keeping it based in a university would facilitate its ability to get grants from multiple ministries and enhance its ability to carry on its mission in an interdisciplinary fashion.

In contemplating why this change is being considered, two old sayings come to mind. The first old is that “a prophet is without honor in his/her own country”. The second old saying is that “if something is not broken, do not fix it”. The NKVTS is a crown jewel that is internationally recognized, that is addressing an extremely important problem, and that has been extraordinarily successful. It reflects great credit on the University of Oslo. It is clearly not broken. Does the University of Oslo not recognize what a treasure it has? If something is successful and working well, why is there any consideration of making changes that could result in unintended consequences that might harm the NKVTS?

I respectfully urge you to give careful thought about making this change because I am concerned that it might do considerably more damage than good. One alternative you might consider would be to convene an international group of experts who could conduct a more thorough examination of the NKVTS and alternative proposals for its relocation and provide you with assessments of the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Thank you for considering the issues I am raising, and I would be delighted to discuss this further or provide additional information if you would like.