



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY  
9500 GILMAN DRIVE (MC 0812)  
LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA 92093-0812

November 12, 2018

Dear Ministry of Health and Care Services,

I recently learned that the Norwegian Government is considering a proposal to incorporate the Norwegian Center on Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) into the Public Health Institute (FHI). I have had the pleasure of working with the productive and insightful researchers at the NKTVS on multiple successful projects over many years. I am very familiar with the NKTVS and the work of its incredible team of researchers and staff members. I am the director of the Child and Adolescent Services Research Center at the University of California, San Diego and I understand the administrative and organizational challenges of developing and maintaining a research center dedicated understanding violence and abuse and improving population mental health and well-being. I am writing to express my own concern and that of much of the international scientific community studying traumatic stress about this proposal. I believe it is important to Norway and the international field of traumatic stress studies that the NKVTS remain an independent, academically affiliated center dedicated to its current mission with sufficient resources to continue and expand its work.

Having an independent center focused on better understanding violence and traumatic stress and effective ways to treat and improve public mental health is critically important. Unfortunately, exposure to violence and resulting trauma-related problems are highly prevalent and very serious problems that plague every country and every community. Violence and abuse is extraordinarily common, as demonstrated by research conducted by the NKTVS. Multiple research studies, including those done by the NKVTS, have found that exposure to violence and other traumatic events is root source of a multitude of personal and societal problems. For example, a recent study in the U.S. found that serious violence and adversity in childhood is associated with the development of nearly one-third of all psychiatric disorders in the population. The negative impact of violence and traumatic stress to victims, their families, and communities is staggering. The good news is that research conducted by the NKVTS and other centers has found promising solutions and responses to these problems that can educate public policy and community services. Given the significant impact of violence and traumatic stress on society, having an independent research center that is laser focused on this problem is critically important.

The government and people of Norway should be proud of the important work of the NKVTS for Norway, and also to the international community. NKVTS is one of the most highly respected research organizations in the world dedicated to research on violence and traumatic stress. Since its inception, it has conducted a series of highly sophisticated studies focusing on a wide array of topics, including the prevalence and impact of different forms of violence and abuse among children and adults, mental health treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder and other trauma-related problems, and how best to implement and incorporate evidence-based interventions practices into community service agencies. I have conducted large scale research and implemented interventions aimed at reducing abuse, neglect, and related trauma. The studies conducted by NKVTS have had enormous impact not only in Norway, but internationally. Those of us who do these sorts of research studies always draw upon the work of the NKVTS and seek their consultation to educate and improve our own work. The NKVTS is simply an incredible international resource, a jewel in the area of violence and traumatic stress studies. Consequently, we are very concerned about any potential threat to its work.

Building a world-class research team such as the NKTVS takes leadership, vision, commitment, time, and dedicated resources. This has been accomplished through the foresight and support of the Norwegian government,

and also from the dedication and productivity of NKVTS research and implementation teams. As a center director myself, I know that it is critically important that such as center be within an organizational context that supports its mission and understands the challenges of doing this sort of interdisciplinary, highly sensitive research about emotionally charged topics. Government public health agencies have roles and responsibilities about the broad field of general health that are determined by law and policy. Such a context makes it more difficult to do innovative, cutting-edge research focused on highly sensitive topics such as violence and abuse. In addition, competing for research funds and resources with researchers investigating a large array of more traditional and familiar general health problems is a serious challenge for a field like violence and abuse that is so important, especially in our current international political landscape. I am concerned that the transfer of the NKTVS to a large public health government agency from an academic institution risks diluting its mission, reducing its resources, and ultimately disrupting its carefully constructed interdisciplinary research team. Such an outcome would be a disastrous loss to Norway and the international research community.

I urge the officials in charge to maintain the NKTVS as an independent research center dedicated to better understanding and addressing all aspects of violence and traumatic stress in society. Speaking from my own experience as a leader of a similar center, being affiliated with an academic institution provides the best organizational context for such centers. If you would like to know more about my high esteem for the NKTVS or how an academic home better facilitates its mission and impact, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Aarons', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gregory A. Aarons  
Professor: UC San Diego Department of Psychiatry  
Director: Child and Adolescent Services Research Center