

PREPARED TESTIMONY  
OF

LAWRENCE A. FELDMAN, PH.D.  
VICE PRESIDENT  
UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY OF NEW JERSEY

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

MARCH 27, 2003  
334 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
10:00 A.M.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE, I AM LAWRENCE A. FELDMAN, PH.D., VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY OF NEW JERSEY.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY OF NEW JERSEY (UMDNJ) IS THE LARGEST FREESTANDING PUBLIC UNIVERSITY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES IN THE NATION. THE UNIVERSITY IS LOCATED ON FIVE STATEWIDE CAMPUSES AND CONTAINS THREE MEDICAL SCHOOLS, AND SCHOOLS OF DENTISTRY, NURSING, HEALTH RELATED PROFESSIONS, PUBLIC HEALTH AND GRADUATE BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES. UMDNJ COMPRISES A UNIVERSITY-OWNED ACUTE CARE HOSPITAL, THREE CORE TEACHING HOSPITALS, AN INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM, A STATEWIDE SYSTEM FOR MANAGED CARE AND AFFILIATIONS WITH MORE THAN 200 HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS STATEWIDE.

WE CONGRATULATE CHAIRMAN CHRIS SMITH AND THIS COMMITTEE FOR SECURING THE PASSAGE OF PUBLIC LAW 107-287, THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS ACT OF 2002. THIS LEGISLATION RECOGNIZES OUR NATION'S CONTINUED VULNERABILITY TO BIOLOGICAL, CHEMICAL OR RADIOLOGICAL ATTACK AND THE UNIQUE RESOURCES THAT EXIST WITHIN THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION AND

OUR NATION'S MEDICAL AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS SCHOOLS TO BETTER PREPARE FOR THESE CONTINGENCIES.

TODAY AS OUR NATION COMMITS ITS MILITARY FORCES TO DEFEND FREEDOM IN IRAQ, OUR BRAVE SOLDIERS LAY EXPOSED TO THE POTENTIAL OF BIOLOGICAL OR CHEMICAL ATTACK. ONCE RETURNED HOME, OUR VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITALS WILL BE CALLED UPON TO PROVIDE THE CARE NEEDED TO RETURN OUR VETERANS TO PRODUCTIVE LIVES.

THE NEW STATUTE RECOGNIZES THAT MANY DISEASES AND TOXINS THAT TERRORISTS MIGHT USE ARE NOT SEEN IN THE NORMAL COURSE OF CIVILIAN MEDICAL PRACTICE, AND ONLY RARELY IN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT.

REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS CENTERS CREATED UNDER THE NEW LAW JOINS THE RESOURCES OF VA MEDICAL CENTERS WITH SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE, PUBLIC HEALTH, ALLIED HEALTH AND NURSING TO WORK COOPERATIVELY IN DEVELOPING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO RESPOND TO TERRORIST AND OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH THREATS. THE DESIGNATED PREPAREDNESS CENTERS WOULD PROVIDE TRAINING TO VA STAFF, COMMUNITY PHYSICIANS, AND OTHER HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS IN THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF INJURIES OR

ILLNESSES INDUCED BY EXPOSURES TO CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL SUBSTANCES, RADIATION, AND INCENDIARY OR OTHER EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS OR DEVICES. IN THIS WAY THE VA EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS ACT LEVERAGES THE STRONG AFFILIATIONS THAT EXIST BETWEEN VA MEDICAL CENTERS AND MANY OF OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE VA NEW JERSEY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IS A MAJOR TRAINING SITE FOR UMDNJ STUDENTS AND GRADUATES. MEDICAL STUDENTS AND RESIDENTS, AS WELL AS MEDICAL, NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH UNDERGRADUATES PARTICIPATE IN CLINICAL ROTATIONS AND CLERKSHIPS WITHIN THE LYONS AND EAST ORANGE VA FACILITIES TO ENHANCE THEIR CLINICAL SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE WHILE DELIVERING HEALTH SERVICES TO VETERANS.

THE TRAINING OF PHYSICIANS AND OTHER HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS IN THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF ILLNESSES CAUSED BY EXPOSURE TO BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES, AS PROVIDED IN THE NEW STATUTE, IS AN INTEGRAL, NATURAL AND CRITICAL EXPANSION OF THE MISSION OF THE NATION'S HEALTH PROFESSIONS SCHOOLS. UMDNJ- NEW JERSEY MEDICAL SCHOOL HAS PROVIDED TRAINING IN BIOTERRORISM RELATED ISSUES TO ITS GRADUATE STUDENTS FOR SEVERAL YEARS. UMDNJ AND RUTGERS UNIVERSITY JOINTLY SPONSOR A NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)/NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SCIENCE

NATIONAL CENTER OF EXCELLENCE, THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SCIENCES INSTITUTE (EOHSI), CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE NATION'S FOREMOST PROGRAMS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING CONCERNING CHEMICAL AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS. FACULTY AT EOHSI ARE ALREADY WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE VA TO DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL MODULES ON EXPOSURE-RELATED CHRONIC ILLNESSES. THE CREATION OF REGIONAL VA PREPAREDNESS CENTERS COULD EFFECTIVELY LEVERAGE THESE EXISTING RESOURCES TO ENHANCE THE EDUCATION AND PREPAREDNESS OF OUR NATION'S MEDICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNITIES.

REGIONAL VA PREPAREDNESS CENTERS WOULD ALSO BE CALLED UPON TO INCREASE OUR NATION'S CAPACITY FOR CARRYING OUT RESEARCH ON THE DETECTION, DIAGNOSIS, PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF INJURIES AND ILLNESSES RELATED TO EXPOSURE TO CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL OR RADIOLOGICAL TOXINS. THESE CENTERS WOULD ENGAGE IN DIRECT RESEARCH AND COORDINATE THEIR ACTIVITIES WITH AFFILIATED SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE, SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC HEALTH, AND OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AGENCIES TO LEVERAGE EXISTING RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES.

FOR EXAMPLE, AS THE STATE'S ONLY ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTER, UMDNJ OFFERS AN INTEGRATED NETWORK OF BASIC AND APPLIED

RESEARCH THAT ADDRESSES THE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF EXPOSURE TO BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WEAPONRY. AT ITS BIOSAFETY LEVEL 3 LABORATORY, THE UMDNJ CENTER FOR BIODEFENSE IS CONDUCTING RESEARCH TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN IMMUNE RESPONSE TO INFECTION BY A WIDE RANGE OF AGENTS.

AS ONE OF TWO WAR-RELATED ILLNESS AND INJURY STUDY CENTERS CREATED BY THE VA, THE EAST ORANGE CAMPUS OF THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION NEW JERSEY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IS COLLABORATING WITH UMDNJ TO INCREASE THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEDICALLY UNEXPLAINED SYMPTOMS OF VETERANS DEPLOYED TO COMBAT AREAS. UMDNJ AND VA COLLABORATIONS EXTEND TO MANY OTHER AREAS, INCLUDING THE MEDICAL CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS.

UMDNJ AND THE VA NEW JERSEY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM ENJOY MANY OTHER CLOSE AFFILIATIONS IN RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE THAT WOULD PROVIDE CRITICAL SUPPORT IN MEETING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STATUTE TO ENHANCE OUR NATION'S PREPAREDNESS.

WE CONGRATULATE THE FULL COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN IN SECURING \$20 MILLION IN BUDGET AUTHORITY WITHIN THE VETERANS PORTION OF THE HOUSE BUDGET RESOLUTION, PROVIDING SUFFICIENT BUDGET ALLOWANCE FOR FIRST YEAR FUNDING TO ESTABLISH FOUR NATIONAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CENTERS. WE URGE THE CONGRESS TO COMPLETE THIS JOB AND PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORT FOR THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC LAW 107-287. THE TIME TO ENHANCE OUR NATION'S PREPAREDNESS FOR BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL ATTACK IS NOW AND THE VA, TOGETHER WITH AFFILIATED SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE, OFFERS SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES AND ASSETS TO MEET THESE OBJECTIVES.

THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAR BEFORE THE COMMITTEE.