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• [Money-Saving Tips from the Queen](#) 2 of 6



• [Brooklyn Decker Lands SI Swimsuit Cover](#) 3 of 6

• [Palin: Global Warming Just Palin: Global Warming Just "Snake Oil"](#) 4 of 6

• [Avoiding Those Annoying Hidden Fees](#) [Avoiding Those Annoying Hidden Fees](#) 5 of 6

• [@katiecouric: Drew Brees](#) [@katiecouric: Drew Brees](#) 6 of 6

Jul 14, 2008

## U. South Florida Prof Helps Restructure Relief Efforts

(UWIRE.com) *This story was written by Andrea Lypka, The Oracle*

An assistant professor of psychology at USF has been appointed to a national subcommittee that is dedicated to addressing concerns of mental health brought on by mass casualty emergencies.

Lisa Brown, who works at the Department of Aging and Mental Health at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, was appointed as a voting member to the Disaster Mental Health Subcommittee.

"I am excited to participate as a member of the subcommittee," Brown said. "This is an opportunity to have an impact on policy at a national level to improve disaster mental health care."

Brown's areas of expertise are older adults, special population, communications and the delivery of mental health services.

Her research has proven that, in the past, a high percentage of hurricane survivors experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression, yet they didn't find help.

One of Brown's main goals is to improve disaster relief services. Her work helps first responders, mental health specialists and other specialists such as those who care for senior citizens.

"For a variety of reasons, many people who are adversely affected by disasters do not elect to receive disaster mental health services," Brown said. "When and how these services are delivered is extremely important."

A division of the National Biodefense Science Board, the subcommittee addresses communication, education and the use of mental health interventions before, during and after emergencies involving a significant number of casualties. Members of the subcommittee include experts in public and mental health, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Chair of the board Patricia Quinlisk said the subcommittee was created as recognition that disasters can sometimes affect communities mentally as well as physically.

Quinlisk, a medical epidemiologist at the Iowa Department of Public Health and a professor at the University of Iowa, said that in the past decade it has been recognized that mental health issues are very substantial.

She also said 90 percent of Americans affected by 9/11 reported sleeping problems and that this is an example of a mental health side effect of a disaster.

"Until recently, the emphasis has largely been on physical safety and meeting medical needs," Quinlisk said. "There is a growing recognition that mental health needs to be incorporated into all phases of a disaster. I believe that the activities of the subcommittee will make a significant contribution to improving our systems of care."

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