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Uniformed Services University, Voices of September 11th, CRCVC Partner for Terrorism Bereavement Study

Bethesda, MD –Terrorist attacks were responsible for the deaths of more than 2,977 individuals killed on Sept. 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pa., and 329 individuals (268 of them Canadian citizens) who lost their lives in the Air India Flight 182 bombing off the west coast of Ireland in 1985. Both attacks remain the worst acts of terrorism in the history of their respective countries.

In a unique study examining the impact of terrorism related death on family bereavement, scientists from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS), led by Dr. Stephen Cozza, will team with Voices of September 11th (VOICES) and the Canadian Resource Center for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) to research the impact of terrorism on surviving family members from these two attacks.

The study, entitled “Investigating the Long-Term Impact of Bereavement Due to Terrorism: Factors that Contribute to Trauma, Grief, Growth and Resilience”, will identify the long-term needs of individuals impacted by terrorism, and will help expand scientific advancement of research in the field, guide communities in providing services to victims’ families, and help individuals heal after traumatic events.

Cozza, professor of Psychiatry in USU’s F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine and associate director of the CSTS, specializes in clinical and community response to trauma and the impact of deployment and combat injury on military service members and their families. He was instrumental in executing the first mental health response to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the Pentagon and is in the midst of the first systematic study of the impact of bereavement on surviving family members of those who died while on active duty -- the National Military Family Bereavement Study (www.militarysurvivorstudy.org).

Cozza will serve as Principal Investigator for the new study. "This study will help us better understand the longer term effects of terrorism-related bereavement and, by doing so, further define community resources and support services that can foster the integration of grief under such difficult circumstances," he said.

“The death of a family member, especially in a terrorist attack, is a life-changing event for the entire family,” said VOICES Founding Director Mary Fetchet, LCSW, whose eldest son, Brad, perished in the attacks on the World Trade Center. “The research project is a unique opportunity for families to provide important insight into factors that contribute to trauma, grief, personal growth and resilience.”

"We are honored to be part of this innovative research project with family members who lost loved ones in 1985 and 2001," added Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director of the CRCVC. “By participating in the research, the Air India Flight 182 and September 11th families will identify what is needed to help facilitate healing and recovery over the long-term for persons affected by terrorism."

Learning to Care for Those in Harm's Way

The study is funded by Public Safety Canada's Kanishka Project Contribution Program. According to Cozza, a final report on the study's findings will be issued in March 2016.

The project is accessible through the VOICES website at www.voicesofseptember11.org. The team is seeking as many family members as possible to participate in the study to include a variety of unique personal experiences. Participants, who must be directly or indirectly related to a victim of one of these attacks and 18 years or older, will be asked to complete an online questionnaire that takes approximately 40-50 minutes. For more information on the study, visit the project website.

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About USU:

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU), founded by an act of Congress in 1972, is the academic heart of the Military Health System. USU students are primarily active duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who receive specialized education in tropical and infectious diseases, TBI and PTSD, disaster response and humanitarian assistance, global health, and acute trauma care. A large percentage of the university's more than 5,200 physician and 790 advanced practice nursing alumni are supporting operations around the world, offering their leadership and expertise. USU also has graduate programs in biomedical sciences and public health committed to excellence in research, and in oral biology. The University's research program covers a wide range of clinical and basic science important to both the military and public health. For more information, visit www.usuhs.edu.

About CSTS:

The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS) is one of the nation's oldest and most highly regarded academic-based organizations dedicated to advancing trauma-informed knowledge, leadership and methodologies. The Center's work addresses a wide scope of trauma exposure from the consequences of combat, operations other than war, terrorism, natural and human made disasters, and public health threats. CSTS is a part of our nation's federal health sciences university, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU), and its F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry. These affiliations represent the Center's history, mission and future directions as a major contributor to our country's understanding of the impact of trauma and the advancement of trauma-informed care. For more information, visit www.cstsonline.org.