Title: Effective Media Communication of Disasters: Pressing Problems and Recommendations

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Deborah Saltman,

We are grateful for the opportunity to revise and re-submit this manuscript. Our careful attention to each comment from the reviewers has improved the quality of this manuscript. Although our main objectives and conclusions were not altered, we have taken advantage of several important suggestions to improve the clarity of our presentation.

COMMENTS FROM THE REVIEWER 1 (Kristine M Gebbie)

1. Table summarizing key findings and key recommendations

   We have inserted Table 2 to summarize the key findings.

COMMENTS FROM THE REVIEWER 2 (Ivan Oransky)

1. Review the transcripts of the advisor discussion and look for material that would address the real issues in PIO-journalist relationships; namely the conflict of interest of PIOs

   We have added material in several places that addresses journalists’ misgivings about PIO job responsibilities. We have added material to further stress that the journalists’ “watchdog” perspective is deep-seated and reasonable. Also, we have noted that the “watchdog” perspective is compatible with high-quality reporting. We have noted that the advisors acknowledge a professional gulf between journalist and PIOs that would be exceedingly difficult to bridge. We have not reframed any of this material in terms of a PIO “conflict of interest,” a phrase that we cannot find in our notes or transcripts from our discussions. However, we believe that by reinforcing and elaborating points regarding journalist-PIO professional conflicts we have highlighted this as among the most important and difficult issues.

2. Who were these 26 expert advisors?

   A list of advisors and their affiliations is added as Table 1. We have listed only the 23 advisors who signed off on the final consensus report, removing from our list three advisors who dropped out of the process before it was completed (none of these three expressed any objections to the report as it evolved, but we ought not to number them as among those who reviewed our final report).

3. What mix of journalists and public health officials was present? A list of names and affiliations would allow readers to evaluate the strength of their recommendations.
See Table 1. It may be helpful to keep in mind that we recruited not only journalists and PIOs but also those who design and deliver training and education for journalists and PIOs.

4. It might even be necessary to re-convene the advisors in light of the experience with Hurricane Katrina, which was an abysmal failure from the point of view of the PIO-journalist relationship, and occurred after the 2004 meetings of the advisors.

We agree with the reviewer’s suggestion that potentially Katrina may provide a case study; however the proposed solutions presented in our research are descriptive/prescriptive and can be applied to all disaster situations where journalist and PIO’s have to interact.