

On Tuesday, July 30, 2013, the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GoMRI) convened a Public Health Workshop, attended by experts at the intersections of public health, environmental exposures, oceanography, community research, and socioeconomics. The goal of the meeting was to develop a report to inform the GoMRI Research Board of ongoing research and potential future directions for investment related to public health impacts of oil spills with emphasis on the Deepwater Horizon event. Main discussions during the workshop surrounded overarching considerations and approaches to addressing research in these areas, as well as specific areas of interest that would involve interdisciplinary research.

A subset of the GoMRI Research Board discussed with the workshop panelists several approaches that would provide a portfolio of research with the greatest impact on scientific and lay communities. Topics of discussion included 1) the “one health perspective,” or the interdependency between animal health and human health in an ecological framework; 2) the “portfolio perspective,” or taking into consideration the research that will support the greatest research gaps, priorities, and community needs; and 3) the need to both look back at the Deepwater Horizon event specifically and to prepare for the next event, so that subsequent responses can be more prompt and effective. During these discussions, workshop panelists discussed the complexity of the problems and the necessity for collaborations to address the most pressing issues. There was also discussion of the need for a balance between addressing important scientific questions as well as important questions that would positively impact the communities that live in the Gulf region.

A second, equally important topic of conversation concerned scientific research questions that remain to be addressed in the Gulf region. These questions centered around three main areas of investigation: community level issues, individual level issues, and preparedness. At the community level, community resilience, cultural/socioeconomic differences, ecosystem services, the translation of scientific information, risk and risk communication, community-based participatory research, utilization of ethnographic methods, economic impacts, and mental health effects (at the community level) were all discussed. At the individual level, workshop panelists discussed research questions surrounding personal psychological and physical health (e.g., biomarkers of exposure, access to and quality of healthcare, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosocial impacts, dermatological effects), risk management, perceived risk, intervention science, seafood and occupational safety, and composite exposures. Finally, future planning and disaster readiness to better prepare the scientific and lay communities for another oil spill were also discussed. In this context, capacity and infrastructure building for rapid responses and better real-time monitoring, scenario development, and policy issues were all addressed. Decision science, intervention science, and the role of modeling for analysis and prediction in all three areas were also prioritized.

These discussions are very important for GoMRI to achieve its aim to sponsor research with the greatest possible impact. As a result of this meeting, the wording of Theme 5 has been updated to be more encompassing of what the GoMRI Research Board hopes to accomplish in the public health arena. The updated wording reads as follows: **“Impact of oil spills on public health including behavioral, socioeconomic, environmental risk assessment, community capacity and other population health considerations and issues.”** The Research Board hopes that this updated Theme 5 will be successful in garnering the research proposals that address both important scientific gaps and important community concerns.