As we approach the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, there's no doubt that those who were most closely involved are still grappling with the aftermath. However, determining who was actually affected by those events and what's more how much they should be compensated, remains an open question [1].

According to New York City's three 9/11 health programs, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) plagues at least 10,000 fire fighters, police officers, and civilians who were exposed to the attacks. Yet, because PTSD was acknowledged as a valid psychological disorder only three decades ago, the bounds of diagnosis remain unclear. Consequently, those who appear to have developed it in relation to 9/11 are eligible only for treatment assistance, as opposed to both the treatment and compensation that people with physical ailments are entitled to. The James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act provides $4.3 billion to compensate and treat people who have been physically or mentally affected by the events; it offers treatment assistance for a number of psychological illnesses, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, panic disorder, and substance abuse. And despite the limited assistance offered, with each anniversary of the attacks, more people appeal to the program for help. As Anemona Hartocollis observes in her coverage for The New York Times, the growing number of claims is encouraged by institutions and a city government with two main goals: to make as many people as possible feel better, and to try to persuade Congress to provide a steady stream of treatment money. This may make it even more difficult to determine who is deserving of treatment and who has just come to believe their health problems have been caused by 9/11.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross, while acknowledging that PTSD and other psychological illnesses are real effects of the attacks, still questions the degree to which some of these health problems and claims are actually a result of that day's events. How many of these illnesses would have developed independent of 9/11? he wonders. The programs monitoring these after-effects are bending over backwards to get anyone who was in the vicinity on that day to come forward, he says. This has a real impact on the number of health complaints filed, as well as on the resources set aside for treatment and compensation.