On July 3, 2002, Julie Gerberding, MD, MPH, was appointed head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dr. Gerberding had previously served as Acting Deputy Director of the National Centers for Infectious Diseases (NCID) and led the CDC’s response to the anthrax bioterrorism scare in 2001. After becoming director of the CDC, Dr. Gerberding began implementing the “Futures Initiative,” which would have moved the current 12 subdivisions into four coordinating centers. The idea turned out to be wildly unpopular. With 37% of the CDC’s 8,500 employees responding to an anonymous online survey, two-thirds of those responding opposed the reorganization plan. Employees sited as their main objections: “an ‘inappropriate’ business focus to the public health mission of CDC, low employee morale, increased bureaucracy, loss of trust, loss of important staff members, and damage to the reputation of the agency” (Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report, 2005).

Following the announcement of the reorganization, four former directors of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) wrote a letter voicing concern about the reorganization plan (Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report, 2004). Dr. James Hughes, the Center for Infectious Diseases director, and Dr. Harold Marolis, the chief of the viral hepatitis division for 17 years, both resigned because of the focus on reorganization rather than on scientific inquiry. Their resignations meant that six of the eight department heads at the time had resigned. Dr. Gerberding is the first female director of the CDC; all four former directors of NIOSH and all those who have resigned are male. A controversial statement made in 2005 by Harvard University’s President Howard Summers ignited a national conversation about the role of women in science and math. Summers stated that “innate differences between men and women might be one reason fewer women succeed in science and math careers” (Bombardieri, 2005). Dr. Gerberding herself, in response to the statement, recounted her own discrimination:

There was a point in my professional development when I was at a university where I really did feel almost like giving up because I was told by someone in a position of authority that the field that I was engaged in, epidemiology, was not really a science. And that as a woman if I wanted to be eligible for tenure, I would need to find a different discipline because I would have two strikes against me. I was very discouraged and very, very tearful, and then I got mad. And then I got energized, and I said, “No, that’s not right; I’m a competent scientist; I’m going to be the best that I can be"