

Healthcare challenges straight from the state

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Students primarily in the Department of Global Health Management and Policy heard from not one but two state health secretaries in an informal discussion right on the SPHTM campus. Dr. Rebekah Gee, current secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health, and Dr. William Hazel, former secretary of health and human resources for the state of Virginia, shared their thoughts on managing broad state health agencies with a full classroom of students, faculty, and staff.



Dr. Rebekah Gee talks with students after the presentation.

Gee, an obstetrician, oversees Louisiana's largest agency with a budget of \$14 billion. Her responsibilities include public health and other direct service programs for citizens in need, such as behavioral health, developmental disabilities, aging and adult services, emergency preparedness, and the Medicaid program.

Hazel recently concluded his service as secretary and has spent his career as an orthopedic surgeon, including seven years as the team surgeon for the Washington D.C. professional football team. As Virginia's health secretary, he oversaw 11 state agencies with over 16,000 employees and approximately one-third of the state's budget.

The two secretaries discussed the challenges facing states today including providing health services to diverse populations, responding to an increasing number of emergencies including flooding and storms, the opioid crisis, and mental health

issues. Despite serving in two different states, they shared many of the same concerns and opportunities.