Hurricane Katrina

The day after the storm, Kenneth Thompson, MD, a UAB emergency medicine resident, threw his mountain bike in the back of his small plane and flew to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, a historic Gulf Coast town that had been home to his family for four generations. He was searching for his uncle and three teenaged cousins.

When he could not find his family, he biked and hitchhiked across the devastated community, where more than 95% of homes were damaged, to the small Hancock Medical Center. For 3 days, Dr. Thompson joined two emergency department physicians, one general surgeon, and Hancock’s CEO, triaging and treating hundreds of patients. “We basically had to send all but the most seriously wounded away,” he says. “We had limited medical resources, no power, and no hot water. We gave people what they needed from whatever antibiotics and other medicines we had.

“I could not believe the destruction. It was like a third world country,” he says. “I saw an elderly woman being pushed along in a shopping cart with a mattress. Your jaw and your heart just dropped.”

Dr. Thompson’s uncle and cousins survived the storm. After water reached the second floor of their home, they swam out a window and clung to tree branches for several hours until help arrived. They are now living with a family friend in Hoover.

The small town of Gautier, located on the Mississippi Gulf Coast between Biloxi and Pascagoula, also received help from UAB faculty. When Sarah Brunner, MD, the wife of UAB Associate Professor of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Robert Brunner, MD,
“UAB was proud to be called upon as first responder through CCT,” says UABHS Associate Vice President and CCT Administrator Robert Cofield, DrPH. “In the disaster’s aftermath, CCT has continued to serve evacuees in the Birmingham region and will continue to do so until the Gulf Coast gets back on its feet.”

UAB faculty and staff were on hand, along with other community organizations, to triage the 159 evacuees who arrived at Birmingham’s Air National Guard hanger via three C-130 aircraft. Evacuees were routed to Birmingham by the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS), an arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) that moves medical teams, supplies, and equipment to affected areas and evacuates injured individuals to unaffected areas for medical care.

The Birmingham Regional Emergency Medical Services System trauma communication center coordinated distribution of 98 patients to 12 Birmingham-area NDMS hospitals. Medical personnel at the airport triaged patients to disease-related color-coded tarps and had them en route to area hospitals within 45 minutes of aircraft arrival.

“People responded creatively and compassionately to a difficult situation,” CCT Medical Director Marlon Priest, MD, says. “We thank the medical staff a thousand times over for its efforts on many fronts during this disaster.”

As 1 of 17 NDMS hospitals in Alabama, University Hospital provides about half of the 827 beds available in the state. Ultimately, UABHS providers at University Hospital (UH), UAB Medical West (UABMW), and HealthSouth Medical Center admitted 31 patients through the NDMS system, and UABHS continues to care for patients displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

UAB: KEY ROLE AT BJCC SHELTER

UAB doctors and community colleagues also saw hundreds of patients at the BJCC shelter. “UAB played a major leadership role,” says Associate Professor of Pathology Richard Powers, MD, who was recently appointed medical director for Alabama’s Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation — a position created to coordinate care for mentally handicapped people during such events. “The situation was chaotic — quiet one moment, flooded with patients the next. Systems did not always work, but volunteers worked calmly and efficiently to meet evacuees’ medical needs.”

Dr. Powers notes that BJCC became a word-of-mouth medical hub, not just for refugees sheltered there, but for other evacuees scattered around Birmingham. Many people staying in hotels or with friends needed immediate medical assistance — prescription refills, blood sugar checks, insulin shots, or critical heart medicines.

“Without medication and established routines, mentally ill people can quickly deteriorate,” he says. “After consulting with Division of Public Psychiatry Director Dr. Jackie Feldman, we sent many distressed individuals to her clinic. That is just one example of the many UAB specialty clinics that opened their doors.”

OTHER UABHS SUPPORT

◆ The Kirklin Clinic® medical faculty served at local Red Cross shelters. UH provided pharmacy technicians and drugs to these same shelters.
◆ UABMW employees donated 300 toiletry bags to local evacuees, as well as some in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.
◆ UABMW employees sponsored a baby shower for a Louisiana patient and her twins born at the center.
◆ HealthSouth Medical Center employees assisted FEMA with health information management activities in Mississippi for weeks in October.
◆ UAB and UABHS have offered to deploy a team of 15 to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Gulf Coast region.
◆ Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital physicians, nurses, and other staff members were on standby for ocular emergencies.
Open Hearts, Helping Hands
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called UAB physiatrist Laura Kezar, MD, to ask for the loan of her horse trailer. Dr. Kezar learned that Sarah’s parents had been driving back and forth from their home in Gautier to Birmingham every other day, returning to Mississippi with loads of food and water. With help from the Shades Valley Lutheran Church and Altamont School, where Dr. Kezar’s daughter is a senior, the Brunners and Dr. Kezar organized a larger effort. On their first trip to Gautier, accompanied by several Altamont students, Dr. Kezar and the Brunners brought many items, including loads of clean socks and underwear. When they arrived, they saw the socks were useless — almost everyone was barefoot, shoes ruined by the mud. And raw sewage lay everywhere. The group returned to Birmingham, took up a collection at Spain Rehabilitation Center, quickly gathering more than $2,000 toward supplies and more than 300 boots for the people of Gautier.
IN THE NEWS

Birmingham Area Votes For UAB

University Hospital has again been named one of the nation’s top hospitals by the National Research Corporation (NRC). The award identifies institutions rated by health care consumers as having the highest quality and image in their metropolitan area. University Hospital received the NRC award on three previous occasions for its leadership in delivery of quality health care and is the only Birmingham hospital to receive this accolade for 2005.

“It is gratifying to know that the community we serve appreciates our delivery of the highest quality health care,” UAB Health System CEO David Hoidal says. “We are pleased once again to join some of the finest hospitals in the country in receiving this Consumer Choice Award.”

Based on a national study (margin of error, 0.2%) of more than 200,000 households, the NRC award is given annually to 180 hospitals around the United States. NRC is a health care performance measurement and improvement company based in Lincoln, Nebraska.

CANCER CENTER DIRECTORSHIP CANDIDATE PRESENTATIONS

The UAB community is invited to attend upcoming presentations from candidates for the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center directorship.

David Carbone, MD, PhD, professor of medicine and cell biology at Vanderbilt University, will speak at 3 PM on November 22.

Everett Vokes, MD, professor of medicine in the University of Chicago’s Section of Hematology/Oncology, will present at 2 PM on November 28.

Peter Emanuel, MD, professor of medicine in UAB’s Division of Hematology/Oncology, will speak at 4 PM on December 2.

Gerard Evan, PhD, professor of molecular and cellular pharmacology at the University of California, San Francisco, will present his remarks at 8:30 AM on December 6. All presentations will be held in West Pavilion Conference Room E.

Appointments

Devang J. Desai, MD, 801-7936, JT N 3rd Floor, Radiology, Effective July

John B. Doremus, Jr., MD, 801-7936, JT N 3rd Floor, Radiology, Effective July