

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Media Contacts: Donna Hansard or Katherine Morales
214-648-3404

Donna.hansard@utsouthwestern.edu
Katherine.morales@utsouthwestern.edu

UT Southwestern medical staff, students contribute to Hurricane Katrina relief efforts

DALLAS – Sept. 15, 2005 – Physicians, employees and students from UT Southwestern Medical Center, who began relief efforts even before Hurricane Katrina evacuees began pouring into Dallas, have treated thousands of its victims in the storm's wake.

"UT Southwestern physicians have established a medical command center at the Dallas Convention Center, where they have set up a field hospital and where faculty, staff, residents and medical students have treated more than 4,000 evacuees in the first week," said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. "I'm proud of their efforts."

They are going the extra mile to aid in Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, from providing emergency medical care and mental health services in Louisiana and Dallas, to throwing a birthday party for an elderly hospital patient separated from her loved ones in New Orleans.

In Dallas, faculty and employees from UT Southwestern University Hospitals have volunteered in large numbers, working at Reunion Arena and the Dallas Convention Center to help with the relief effort. From nurses and pharmacists to respiratory therapists and psychiatrists, medical staff have responded and worked long hours.

Dr. Raymond Fowler, associate professor of emergency medicine at UT Southwestern and deputy medical director for operations and quality assurance for the Dallas Area BioTel (EMS) System, oversees the medical command center. The effort includes more than a dozen physicians from UT Southwestern, assisted by medical staff from Parkland Memorial Hospital, Children's Medical Center Dallas, and UT Southwestern's hospitals and clinics, working up to 20-hour days to care for the sick and injured. Facilities include an 11-bed urgent care center and 20-bed chronic care center.

UT Southwestern's Department of Psychiatry, with the assistance of the City of Dallas Crisis Team, established a mental-health clinic as a part of the medical services for victims of Katrina housed at the Dallas Convention Center. Psychiatrists, psychologists, psychology graduate students and psychiatry residents volunteered around the clock, treating nearly 500 patients in the clinic. Another

approximately 500 evacuees discussed mental health issues with UT Southwestern faculty and staff in other clinics and as they walked around the convention center floor.

“After an emergency staff meeting Friday morning (Sept. 2), volunteers were organized to help establish a mental-health-care clinic for evacuees of Hurricane Katrina at the Dallas Convention Center,” said Dr. David Tyler, professor of psychiatry and vice chairman for clinical services. “Working closely with Dr. Alan LaGrone (assistant professor of psychiatry at UT Southwestern and medical director of psychiatric emergency service at Parkland) and the City of Dallas Crisis Team, we had the clinic up and running, staffed 24/7 by psychiatrists and psychologists wanting to help, by Friday afternoon.”

His staff worked throughout the holiday weekend and the following two weeks. As awareness of the center grew, mental-health professionals from other medical facilities began offering assistance as well, Dr. Tyler said.

Several UT Southwestern pediatric doctors staffed medical teams at Reunion Arena, treating evacuees at the scene and sending those with more serious problems to Children’s. Pediatric residents also staffed vans providing medical assistance to victims.

About 110 patients transferred from New Orleans area hospitals, as well as evacuees, also were treated at UT Southwestern University Hospitals, with 21 admitted.

“The volunteer spirit of our employees is amazing,” said Sharon Riley, chief executive officer of UT Southwestern University Hospitals and vice president for university hospitals at UT Southwestern. “Many have signed up to work after hours and on their days off helping evacuees from the hurricane who are in Dallas. At their request, the hospital has also sent medications and supplies to assist these victims.”

One New Orleans hospital patient, Ms. Sylvia Taylor, lost track of her family when she was evacuated. The hospital staff surprised her with a birthday cake for her 83rd birthday. But the best present of all came when a UT Southwestern staff member tracked down her family for her and put her in touch with her daughter, who arrived in Dallas to be with her Sept. 7.

Students at UT Southwestern also pooled their resources to help evacuees housed in temporary shelters all over North Texas.

“Not surprisingly, our medical students have been extraordinarily generous and effective already. We’ve had students collecting food and clothing, offering to house displaced Tulane University students when they get here,” said Wes Norred, vice president for student and alumni affairs at UT Southwestern. “We also had a coordinated effort on the part of our medical students to volunteer medical services to evacuees at the Dallas Convention Center.”

Student volunteers made initial visits to some of the sites housing evacuees and then gathered volunteer support to aid medical staff already in place. Nearly 100 medical students rotated through four-hour, round-the-clock shifts.

“Initially, we spoke with officials at the convention center to see how we could help,” said Omar Mesarwi, a third-year medical student. “It started out as a few students and grew into dozens of students working triage, doing blood workups and even seeing patients 24 hours a day.”

More than 30 UT Southwestern residents volunteered in six-hour shifts to take care of thousands of patients in need of medical care. Both residents and medical students continued volunteering at the Dallas Convention Center and Reunion Arena for several weeks after the evacuees’ arrival in the city.

“Students are seeing a lot of things that they wouldn’t otherwise see, and it’s great to be able to do something to help because it seems the scope of the disaster is so overwhelming,” Mr. Mesarwi said.

On Friday, Sept. 2, students began a campuswide food and clothing drive in conjunction with the American Red Cross and the North Texas Food Bank, said Mr. Mesarwi. All donations are being gathered at the Bryan Williams Student Center on campus and then routed to the appropriate aid agencies.

In the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, physicians from UT Southwestern’s Department of Emergency Medicine traveled to Louisiana to assist with medical care, including Dr. Paul Pepe, chairman of emergency medicine; Dr. Raymond Swienton, assistant professor of emergency medicine; and Dr. Kelly Klein, an emergency medicine fellow.

Dr. Pepe, who created an advanced disaster life support class for the FBI and Secret Service, first headed to Baton Rouge after receiving a call for assistance from Louisiana emergency preparedness officials. Upon arriving in Baton Rouge, he was asked to help determine needs and establish field hospitals. Gunfire prevented his helicopter from landing at New Orleans largest public hospital, Charity

Hospital, during his initial departure. He also provided emergency medical care and evacuated patients from the battered New Orleans convention center.

Dr. Swienton helped establish a temporary field hospital at an abandoned K-Mart in Louisiana. Doctors there treated more than 3,000 people in six days and admitted more than 600 to the field hospital.

In addition to providing emergency medical care in New Orleans and at shelters and in UT Southwestern and affiliated hospitals, UT Southwestern also is poised to assist the students, residents and faculty from academic medical centers in New Orleans.

Southwestern Medical School is prepared to accept medical students from Tulane Health Sciences Center and Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center for 3rd and 4th year clinical rotations until those schools are operational again. In addition, UT Southwestern also is prepared to assist biomedical science Ph.D. students, postdoctoral research fellows and allied health students.

Laboratory space for displaced investigators also will be made available at UT Southwestern.

“Members of the UT Southwestern community are giving their time and medical expertise to aid and comfort the victims of this natural disaster,” said Dr. Alfred Gilman, dean of UT Southwestern Medical School. “We are proud of their outstanding efforts to help Dallas provide health and educational services to the evacuees.”

###

This news release is available on our World Wide Web home page at
<http://www.utsouthwestern.edu/home/news/index.html>

To automatically receive news releases from UT Southwestern via e-mail,
subscribe at www.utsouthwestern.edu/receivenews