

HURRICANE KATRINA: Ohio DOs

Hurricane Katrina caused unimaginable devastation and heartbreak throughout the Gulf Coast Region.

Lives were lost. More than 1 million people were displaced. A vast coastline of towns and communities was decimated. Hundreds of thousands suffered, and continue to suffer great hardship.

Katrina first made landfall as a Category 1 hurricane just north of Miami on August 25, 2005, and then hit again four days later along the Central Gulf Coast near Buras-Triumph, Louisiana as a Category 4 storm.

Its storm surge soon breached the levee system that protected New Orleans, leaving the city flooded. This and other major damage to the coastal regions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama made Katrina the most destructive and costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States.

Portsmouth native **Sean Stiltner, DO**, a 2004 graduate of Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine, went to Gulfport, Mississippi, just days after Katrina hit the region.

A flight surgeon with the 1-137th Aviation Battalion of the Ohio Army National Guard, Stiltner was involved in several missions to contain illness and minimize the spread of disease. He also assisted with basic relief operations to deliver food, water, ice and baby supplies.

Stiltner explained he was able to leave his residency program at Southern Ohio Medical Center due to Program Director Terry Johnson, DO. "Dr. Johnson's own involvement with the Guard and guidance helped to prepare me for the trip," Stiltner said.

"I feel very proud of what I accomplished in Mississippi," Stiltner said. "It is because of what I learned at OUCOM and by being a DO I was able to bring people some relief in troubled times."

Deployed by the Ohio National Guard, Major **Timothy J. Wagner, DO**, of Lisbon, was in the Gulf Coast for three weeks, the first several days of which were spent at the Louisiana Superdome in downtown New Orleans, where 20,000 people sought protection from Hurricane Katrina.

Dressed in full riot gear with body armor, Wagner's 1-148 Infantry Battalion was ready for the Convention Center where violence had erupted, but was diverted to the Superdome. Wagner said things there were for the most part calm and without incident, so when he saw a medical tent nearby he volunteered to help.

For four hours, he and six combat medics went into the crowd to treat patients and started nearly 100 IVs. Many were dehydrated. Low blood sugar, diarrhea, and infected wounds were also common.

As a battalion surgeon, Wagner is responsible for taking care of some 300 troops, but medical supplies he brought for his unit were used instead to treat those at the Superdome. With supplies nearly exhausted, Wagner called on his family members for help. Siblings—who are all DOs—in Michigan, Arizona, and Ohio sent pharmaceuticals and helped spread the word about the immediate need for broad spectrum antibiotics as well as medicines to treat chronic conditions such as chronic and acute cardiac problems, hypertension, and diabetes.

After clearing the Superdome, Wagner's unit moved to northeast New Orleans on Lake Pontchartrain where they traveled by boat and then on foot to evacuate residents from the flooded area.

Wagner, who joined the Guard four years ago, served tours in Iraq and Kosovo. He said it's difficult to compare the situations. "The scale of Katrina's destruction is unimaginable," he said. "In New Orleans, it was complete devastation of the infrastructure."

Elton Lehman, DO, of Mt. Eaton, spent ten days in Gulfport, Mississippi, with a medical team from Little Rock. Working out of a makeshift clinic in a church hall, the team saw more than 900 patients.

For Lehman, who regularly donates his time and talents for medical missions abroad, this was the first time his mission work had been requested in the US. He treated respiratory problems, rashes, insect stings and infected spider bites as well as a number of lacerations of volunteers working in the area. And despite a good table, he was able to provide OMT with positive results.

Lehman said hundreds of prescriptions were written at the clinic. He explained that residents brought their medicine bottles, many empty, to get new prescriptions written. Then,

PHOTOS OPPOSITE PAGE... Top: Students at Centerville Elementary made cards and signs that Constance Ange, DO, delivered when she and her staff provided relief in a small Mississippi town. Top Center: Timothy J. Wagner, DO, assisted evacuees at the Louisiana Superdome in downtown New Orleans. Bottom Center: Constance Ange, DO, with her staff Pam Keene and Paula Cross after their return from Mississippi. Bottom: Sean Stiltner, DO, helps children from Gulfport, Mississippi.

Provide Assistance in Aftermath

because many pharmacies were destroyed, patients had to find new ones to fill them.

In spite of such destruction and hardship, the people were grateful and thankful. "The destruction was unreal," Lehman said. "Everybody had a loss and a story to tell, and yet the people were very grateful for the help they received. They were thankful to be alive. Their spirit was good and they were optimistic."

Christopher A. Kovell, DO, of Columbus, spent two weeks in Louisiana providing psychiatric services to people who had been displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and/or Rita. He volunteered at Red Cross shelters in Shreveport and Monroe as part of a relief effort organized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a division of the US Department of Health and Human Services.

As medical director of the Franklin County ADAMH Board, he was also involved with helping people affected by Katrina who relocated to Columbus.

After Centerville psychiatrist Constance E. Ange, DO, and her staff watched news accounts of the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina they, like others across the country, wanted to help.

So Ange along with Office Manager Pam Keene organized a collection effort, originally collecting medical supplies. But as word spread, local businesses, schools, and others began to donate food, water, clothing, pet food, dental care supplies, toiletries, and more. Four business days later when Ange, Keene, and Paula Cross, a nurse in Ange's office, left for Pearl River County Hospital & Nursing Home in Poplarville, Mississippi, they took two tractor trailers full of donated goods.

The trio arrived September 16 to a hospital without electricity, that had lost 19 patients the week prior, and in dire need of help. "They didn't have a band-aid," Keene said. "They were just done. They had nothing, no medications for their patients, nothing."

The rest of the town, which has about 3,000 residents, wasn't much better. People were camped out at the hospital and living out of cars. "They had no homes," Ange said. "The town was gone."

Rafael E. Villalobos, DO, of Columbus, spent time cleaning and distributing basic supplies—donated and purchased with the help of Doctors Hospital employees—in Pascagoula, Mississippi, which is home to approximately 30,000 residents, including Villalobos' in-laws.

It was September 2, just days after Katrina hit, when Villalobos casually mentioned to the Doctors Hospital surgery staff that he'd be loading his van with supplies and driving to Mississippi after surgery. Word spread throughout the hospital about the trip, and two hours later Villalobos emerged from the OR to discover more than \$1,600 had been collected.

"People poured down to surgery to donate. We even had a temp who donated seven cases of baby food and seven cases of formula," said hospital employee Lara Lindsay.

Villalobos was overwhelmed at the charity as well as the amount of money donated in such a short amount. "It's just a testimony of how much people want to help," he said. "They have it in their heart to help."

He used the funds to buy a generator, lanterns, propane, water, Gatorade and gasoline. Villalobos said those who received the supplies were grateful but too devastated to be excited. "They were just in shock," he said. "Their lives had been turned upside down."



Fisher-Titus Medical Center (FTMC) contributed more than \$36,000 to the American Red Cross Hurricane Disaster Relief Fund after a fundraising effort that included employee donations that were matched by the Norwalk hospital.

FTMC employees contributed more than four months of "banked" vacation time, valued at \$14,918 and gave another \$3,363 in cash to help hurricane victims. The hospital then matched the employees' total \$18,281 donation.

The employee donations were made possible through a week-long fundraiser that included special arrangements allowing staff to contribute up to eight hours of paid time off.

Providing financial support in times of crisis is not something new for FTMC. Hospital employees gave \$28,508 for victims of September 11 and \$20,281 to the American Red Cross Tsunami Relief Fund.

"The outpouring of support from our staff has been tremendous," said FTMC President Patrick J. Martin. "Our Fisher-Titus family has always been very generous and supportive of many, many needs at the local level. Once again their response to a disaster outside our own community shows their concern to lend assistance to victims wherever needed."

Deborah McCain, a credentialing and coding specialist with Providence Medical Group, a physician-owned healthcare network in Dayton led by CEO Paul A. Martin, DO, has offered pro bono assistance to displaced DOs.

Because of her background and work experience starting, running, and closing medical practices, McCain has the expertise physicians in the Gulf Coast region may need. McCain said she is ready to provide suggestions and tools such as inventories of necessary medical and office supplies and equipment, checklists for updating insurance paperwork for carriers, and notification alerts for informing CLIA, DEA, local and state licensure boards, and others.

While she hasn't received any requests for assistance yet, McCain said the offer still stands. And there are plenty who may need the help.

According to some estimates, Hurricane Katrina displaced nearly 6,000 practicing physicians in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Canton-area physician **Lori Drumm, DO**, who is on staff at the US Department of Veterans Affairs' outpatient clinic, asked local physicians through written requests to donate medical utensils, antibiotics, saline and gloves.

Despite her employment with a federal agency, her mission is not a public project. Drumm's intent is to spend her vacation days in either Louisiana or Mississippi. Realizing there could be limitations on what she is permitted to do, she plans to focus on providing supplies for wound treatment and offering vaccinations.

Ohio National Guardsman **Clay Walsh, Jr., DO**, of Medina, completed a 32-day assignment as a primary care physician at a 25-bed mobile medical unit in New Orleans at the US Naval Air Station at Belle Chase.

The mobile surgical hospital is used to treat soldiers. "It feels good to go down there and support your guys," said Walsh. "What better way to help out than to take care of them so they don't have to take up the (medical) resources needed for the civilians."

TO HELP..

The Mississippi Osteopathic Medical Association (MOMA) is helping connect those who want to provide assistance to a specific physician. To participate in the "Adopt A DO" program, contact MOMA Executive Director Jeffrey J. LeBoeuf at 601-366-3105 or via e-mail at jeffrey@moma-net.org.

Louisiana Osteopathic Medical Association (LOMA) Executive Director Ed Williams is working with that state's Emergency Operations Center to compile a list of DOs who want to help with relief efforts. Contact Williams at lomadocs@bellsouth.net.

The Ohio Medical Reserve Corps establishes teams of local medical and public health volunteers who can assist communities during disasters. Register at www.serveohio.org.

DOs and osteopathic medical students who volunteer in the Gulf Coast can apply for a \$500 grant from the AOA Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund. Details are available online at www.do-online.org.

American Physicians Assurance Corporation is waiving med/mal premiums for the company's insured physicians who volunteer with the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. To qualify, call your American Physicians' agent.

Hurricane Katrina regional imagery, taken August 28, 2005, provided by the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration.

