

# HSC Family Steps Up to Help Hurricane Katrina Evacuees

By Melanie Hillis & Scott Merville, Public Affairs

Between Sept. 3 and 12, volunteers and friends of The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston handled around 9,000 patient visits at its clinic for Hurricane Katrina evacuees operated in partnership with the City of Houston and Mayor Bill White in the George R. Brown Convention Center.

HSC President James T. Willerson, M.D., said he has never been prouder of the faculty, staff and students he leads. "This response has been tremendous," he said.

Organizers said 4,000 people — faculty, staff, students, residents, friends of the university and walk-ups — have donated their time to help at the clinic.

"We have a wonderful group of medical personnel who are not just from Houston or from Texas, but from all over the country," said Michael Bungo, M.D., associate dean for Harris County programs at the UT Medical School at Houston and chief of staff at LBJ General Hospital. "We've had an outpouring of volunteerism. From a health-care standpoint, we're meeting immediate needs, but this is going to be a long-term effort."

Memorial Hermann Healthcare System collaborated with the health science center to offer a web-based volunteer scheduling system that greatly improved efficiency. Bungo and many UT Health Science Center volunteers already were helping out at Reliant Center and the Astrodome when Bungo got a phone call early Friday, Sept. 2: Would the university work with Mayor Bill White to organize and run a clinic at the convention center?

"We were up and running by 5 p.m.," Bungo said. "The first group of evacuees arrived around 11 p.m. Friday."

Clinic services included mental health, pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology and trauma, as well as a pharmacy and a lab.

By Tuesday, Sept. 6, the immediate rush had eased. The convention center medical clinic went to 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. hours with emergency care available overnight.

The UT Dental Branch's mobile dental van has also cared for patients in the convention center area. Tracey Godwin, D.D.S., coordinator of the dental van relief efforts, reported a steady flow of patients on Labor Day — many of whom had severe toothaches, abscesses, and quite a few who lost their dentures in the storm. The van provided urgent care, mostly extractions and other methods of pain relief.

Carlos Moreno, M.D., professor and head of the UT Medical School Department of

Family Practice and Community Medicine, said he was impressed by the survivors' tranquility. "These people are calm. They're glad to have someone taking care of them. When they show up, we will take care of them."

More than 4,000 evacuees were processed into the George R. Brown over the Labor Day weekend, with about 2,000 staying at the center. Others had been reunited with family or found other housing.

The city's new focus is to transition the survivors from shelters into private housing.

Mary desVignes-Kendrick, M.D., deputy director of the UT School of Public Health's Center for Biosecurity and Public Health Preparedness, said the Rapid Needs Assessments — students and staff surveying physical and mental needs of evacuees — were going smoothly, and were important for two major reasons.

"The number one priority is monitoring

public health needs, and the number two is establishing a human connection. If there is anyone who wants to talk, they're talking," said desVignes-Kendrick. The School of Public Health and the Student Epidemiology Intelligence Society (SEIS) assessed about 7,000 evacuees at the Astrodome/Reliant Center.

Texas Commissioner of State Health Services Eduardo J. Sanchez, M.D., contacted the UT School of Public Health and was briefed on the public health situation by Scott LillibrIDGE, M.D., director of the school's Center for Biosecurity and Public Health Preparedness.

Scott LillibrIDGE also reported that SPH faculty met with and briefed staff from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention arriving in Houston to help local authorities. Calls are being made to other schools of public health in the southwest region to identify services and volunteers available to come to Houston.

LillibrIDGE noted that Michael Proctor, M.D., regional director of extramural training for the SPH center, assisted in the evacuation of patients from Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans. Proctor reported that more than 7,000 patients had been moved in one 24-hour period to hospitals in Louisiana and other states. Proctor remains attached to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals and will continue in his medical assessment and triage role for the near future. ★



Dental treatment for displaced individuals is handled by UT Dental Branch faculty and students in the university's mobile dental van. Photo by Ester Fant, Medical School



Guenet Hailu Degaffe, M.D., UT Pediatrics, spends time with evacuee Heather Chikinos. Photo by Nancy Hudgins



Louisiana visitor Lana Turner enjoys a hug from her 8-year-old son De Vante, while having her blood pressure checked. UT School of Nursing student Tammy de Lagarza was one of many volunteers from that school triaging the patients, who came in a steady flow to the George R. Brown Convention Center the night of Sept. 3. Photo by Nancy Hudgins



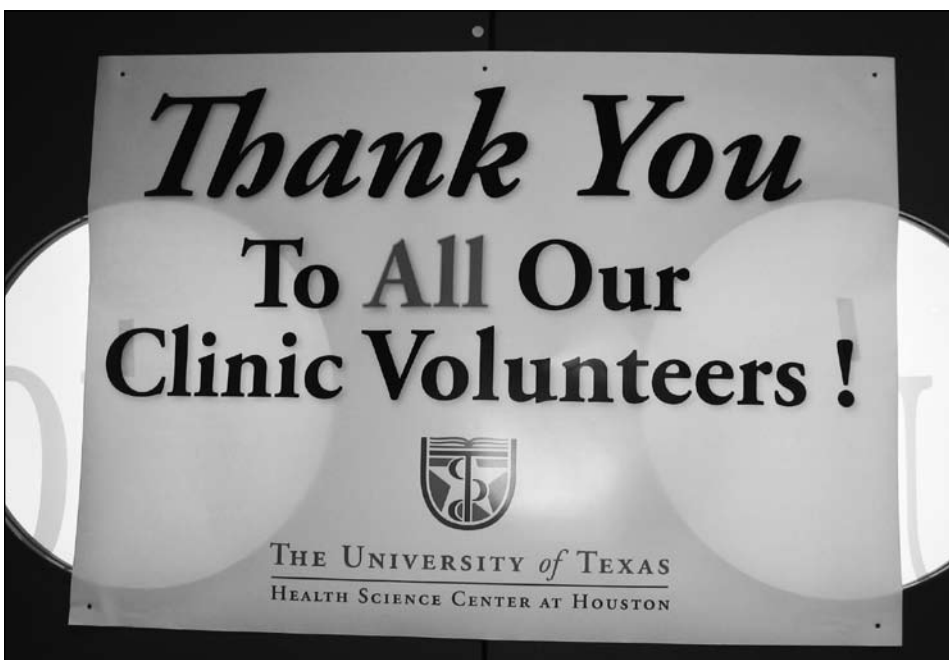
School of Nursing student Ashley Caraway nurtures 7-week-old evacuee Ja-Lea Fulton at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Photo by Nancy Hudgins



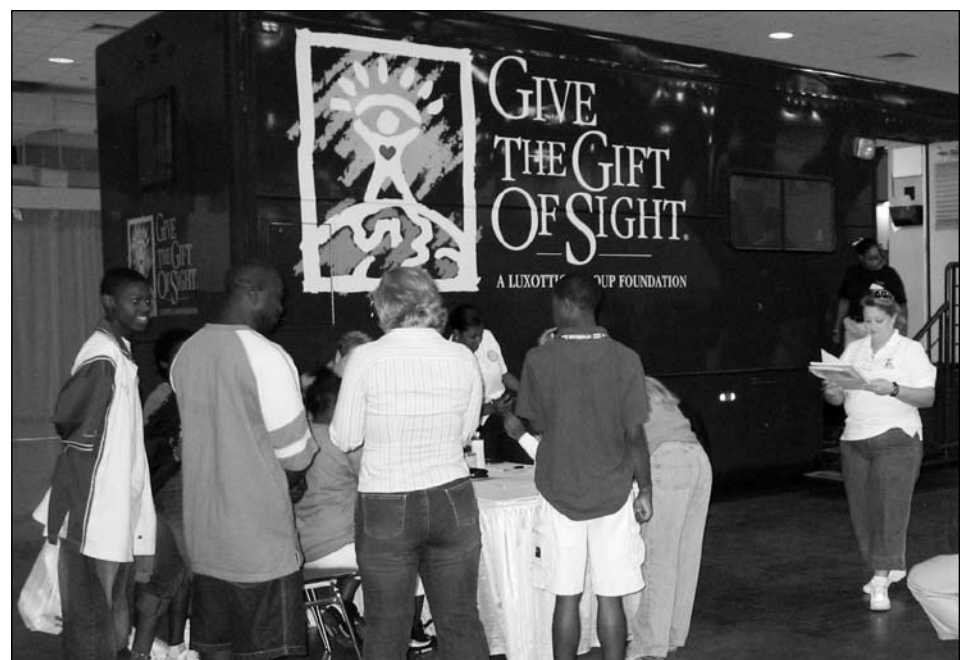
From left, Michael Bungo, M.D., chief of staff at LBJ Hospital, Michael McKinney, M.D., senior vice president and chief operating officer of the health science center, Brent King, M.D., chair of the Medical School's emergency medicine department, and Dan Wolterman, chief executive officer of Memorial Hermann Healthcare, plan the set up of the UT-run clinic at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Photo by Nancy Hudgins



Elena Marks, J.D., director of Health Policy, City of Houston, left, with the City of Houston Mayor's office, tours the UT Medical Clinic for Hurricane Katrina evacuees during the first full day of operation at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Her tour guide was Lou Ann McKinney, right, who worked alongside her husband, Michael McKinney, M.D., to get the clinic up and running. More than 2,000 patient visits were recorded over Labor Day weekend. Photo by Nancy Hudgins.



We couldn't have done it without you, is the sentiment behind this sign at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Photo by Nancy Hudgins



The Gift of Sight van came from California with eyeglasses for those in need. Photo by Nancy Hudgins