

the health advisor

Special Hurricane Edition

DOH Mission:

To promote & protect the health & safety of all people in Florida.

Jan./Feb. 2005

Charley • August 13, 2004, Category 4

Frances • September 5, 2004, Category 2

Ivan • September 16, 2004, Category 3

Jeanne • September 25, 2004, Category 3

The 4 *in* '04

The 2004 hurricane season was the first time since record-keeping began in 1851 that four hurricanes impacted Florida in one year. The only other state to have experienced this level of activity was Texas in 1886.

CHARLEY Hurricane Charley strengthened rapidly just before striking the southwestern coast of Florida as a Category 4 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale. Charley was the strongest hurricane to hit the United States since Andrew devastated Florida's southeast in 1992. Although small in size, Charley caused catastrophic wind damage in Charlotte County and serious damage occurred well inland over the Florida peninsula.

FRANCES Hurricane Frances charged into Florida's east coast with wind roaring at 115 mph and dropped more than 13 inches of rain, stripping away roofs, smashing boats, eroding away a chunk of Interstate 95 and flooding West Palm Beach streets up to four feet deep. The storm also ripped an estimated 1,000 exterior panels from NASA's massive Vehicle Assembly Building at the Kennedy Space Center. The storm's core angled across Florida to enter the Gulf of Mexico north of Tampa, its path crossing some of the area hit by Charley.

IVAN Florida's Panhandle was not to be overlooked during the 2004 hurricane season. Hurricane Ivan came ashore near Gulf Shores, Alabama, on September 16, and wreaked havoc along Florida's western panhandle. After landfall, aerial video, still photography, and airborne laser mapping data were acquired from the impacted areas and compared with earlier data. The comparisons show the nature, magnitude, and spatial variability of coastal changes such as beach erosion and overwash deposition.

JEANNE Jeanne produced heavy rain over Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and caused an estimated 3,000 deaths in Haiti, from torrential rainfall flooding. Finally, the relatively slow-moving Jeanne hit the northern Bahamas and then the central Florida east coast as a Category 3 hurricane where flood/water damage was just part of the major destruction.

The havoc, devastation, and challenges of Hurricane Season 2004 brought to the forefront the strengths of the Florida Department of Health and that of other agencies and people from all over Florida and across borders. Still there are pieces to be put back together for many. Always there will be memories.

Department of Health (DOH) staff was among the many first responders during each of the hurricanes and staff remained until the last emergency shelters closed or immediate environmental hazards were alleviated. Many have contributed personal accounts, poems and other vignettes following their involvement.

Public health responders write about their challenges both personally and professionally. Some say the hurricane recovery efforts were their first experiences with what they termed "real public health." Nearly all will tell you they were amazed by the resiliency and caring attitudes of those impacted. The Health Advisor is grateful for all the submissions—many of which are included in this Special Hurricane Edition. ■

One hurricane is enough. Four can put to the test preparedness, skill, tolerance and stability.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---|
| SECRETARY'S MESSAGE John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H. | 2 |
| OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING Arlene Cotton | 2 |
| CHILDREN'S MEDICAL SERVICES Lisa Chapman, R.N., B.S.N. | 2 |
| WASHINGTON CHD Myra J. Brazell, LCSW | 3 |
| ORANGE CHD Raam Hirlekar, M.D., | 3 |
| FAMILY HEALTH SERVICES Susan Potts | 3 |
| CHILDREN'S MEDICAL SERVICES Janeen Langley, R.N. | 4 |
| ORANGE CHD Cheryl Hammad, R.N., B.S.N. | 5 |
| HURRICANE TIDBITS | 5 |
| EMERGENCY MEDICAL OPERATIONS Jennifer Bencie Fairburn, M.D., M.S.A. | 6 |
| SEMINOLE CHD Katherine L. Catterfeld, M.P.H. | 6 |
| ALACHUA CHD Emily Wilson, R.S., M.P.H. | 6 |
| WIC John Harrison | 7 |
| ESCAMBIA CHD Donna Johnson, S.R.N. | 7 |
| OKEECHOBEE CHD Dora Sanchez | 7 |
| BUREAU OF LABORATORIES Roberta H. Lopez, Dr. P.H., BCLD (ABB) | 7 |
| OFFICE OF PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT Mark O'Neill, Ph.D. | 8 |
| MARTIN CHD | 8 |
| HIGHLANDS CHD Robert "Bob" Kosiba. | 8 |
| POLK CHD | 8 |

secretary's message

Dear Colleagues,



Dr. Agwunobi

Thank you for your dedication to your work and compassion to the people in Florida during hurricane recovery and response. Your skills and capabilities were put to the test along with your personal commitments to public health safety and protection for others with the four severe hurricanes that hit the state within weeks at a time. I am grateful to you.

All of us were personally affected somehow during these storms. Many spent hours preparing, watching, waiting and monitoring the paths and eclectic personalities of each storm. You met the challenges put forth, one by one.

The agency also learned valuable lessons for how it can be even greater prepared and capable in the future. Our allegiance to promote and protect the health and safety of all people in Florida can grow even stronger when we face challenges and learn from them together.

The Special Hurricane Edition of The Health Advisor is one way to pull together some of the personal experiences and thoughts of our DOH family. Thank you also for sharing your stories.

Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H.

Infrastructure for Deployment Began With First Storm Threat

Deployment included **500 public health nurses** and several senior nursing students from Florida

Arlene Cotton, Office of Public Health Nursing

As Tropical Storm Bonnie threatened our state, the Office of Public Health Nursing quickly established the Public Health Nursing infrastructure for deployment of nurses. A Deployment Command Center (DCC) was created and a new process for the mobilization/deployment of nurses developed. With Hurricane Charley, this process evolved into the centralization and oversight for deployment of all human resources and continued to be refined throughout Hurricanes Frances, Ivan and Jeanne. The DCC was charged with tracking the movements of deployed staff and provided daily reports of deployed staff by county and discipline. This required DCC staff to spend countless hours on the phone seeking staff to deploy, providing the specifics of their mission, and securing lodging. DCC staff was the lifeline for many of the ravaged counties. Through perseverance, they mobilized the much needed relief.

The DCC was in daily contact with the impacted counties to assess staffing needs and status of Special Needs Shelters (SpNS). Data was gathered and compiled into reports and shared daily with the State Emergency Operations Center and the Incident Management Team for Emergency Support Function 8. This data was essential in anticipating staffing and material needs.

Every Florida county was involved in disaster response. Florida Public Health Nurses repeatedly volunteered to care for the needs of others. Many went above and beyond and continued deployment for multiple events. Words cannot express the gratitude for these exceptional men and women. In all, more than 500 state public health nurses were deployed over a 6-week period. Many more worked excessive hours in SpNS and where needed in their communities.

Because of the breadth of devastation, Florida reached out to other states and to the federal government. Florida received assistance from Georgia, Iowa, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. More than 250 out-of-state and federal nurses deployed for the four hurricane response efforts. Senior nursing students from Florida Nursing Schools also were deployed. These novice caregivers were invaluable in service and received an experience of a lifetime.

The deployment of Department of Health staff was an immense undertaking. It could never have been accomplished without incredible team spirit and cooperation. Everyone gave generously and tirelessly to promote safety and protect Floridians and others in the state at the time. The Office of Public Health Nursing is proud to have been a small part in the enormous effort. ■



Lisa Chapman, R.N., B.S.N., during community assessment at a Punta Gorda mobile home park following Hurricane Charley.

“Imagine the excitement of getting ‘deployed’ and having the opportunity of serving my community”

Lisa Chapman, R.N., B.S.N., Children’s Medical Services, Gainesville

I was called to Sarasota County where I worked with four other nurses and a social worker. We were sent to a Kids Camp for children severely impacted by Hurricane Charley and bussed in from Punta Gorda. The county’s Parks and Recreational office organized the event.

The event meant ice cream, skating, movies and swimming. What an assignment for an otherwise chaotic and draining time. But still emotion-packed, we nurtured, comforted and provided first aid. Kids told various stories from their experiences during this first hurricane. They experienced everything from witnessing roofs coming off to seeing a loved one killed during the storm. One small child was brought to me covered with ant bites. While talking with him he said he had not had a bath in two weeks because “the hurricane took my water away.” I decided to give him a sponge bath in the sink of the restroom.

Another of my assignments was to perform community assessments, going house to house with another nurse. We were to ensure that residents had adequate food, water and medications. This also included making reports about standing water and sewage problems. Residents had been complaining of the odor due to these problems. And the heat and rain added to the stench. This was nothing like Kids Camp.

What a challenge this was personally and professionally. I learned about what has been referred to as “real public health nursing,” something which is not found in classrooms. We encountered other agencies that referred residents with health needs to us and we referred to them when needed. What amazed me the most about this experience was the humor that residents had despite being stricken by a natural disaster. When we asked an 80-year-old frail woman how she had been coping, she simply stated that she was “in denial.” Her humor caught us all of guard, and it amazed us how resilient some were after losing so much. ■



ABOVE: Florida public health nurses prepare to be transported to areas affected by Hurricane Ivan. In all, some 500 public health nurses shared in the duties of response and recovery during the four hurricanes affecting Florida.

BELOW: Surrounded by broken trees caused by Hurricane Ivan, public health nurses deployed for Santa Rosa County Health Department created a “picnic clinic” here to provide tetanus shots to victims of clean-up related injuries. Volunteer and Children’s Medical Clinic Nurse Diane Clapper says they provided 81 tetanus shots in 3 hours and residents expressed sincere gratitude for someone coming to them.





Bag of Marbles Lightened the Stress Load for Some Following Charley

Myra J. Brazell, LCSW, Social Work Services Program Manager, Washington County Health Department

I was deployed to Charlotte County following Hurricane Charley with a primary mission to accompany a school health nurse to her school sites to offer crisis intervention services to teachers, students and their families. The nurse I accompanied was assigned to all the private schools in Charlotte County that happened to all be faith-based schools.

During our visit to some seven schools in the few days I was there, we handed out more than 25 packets containing Disaster Mental Health Tools and

Tips for teachers and parents. Each teacher and administrator I spoke to were appreciative of our efforts. Some of these schools were badly damaged and some of the people's homes only slightly damaged. However, many had badly damaged homes and their schools were only slightly damaged.

With me I carried a bag of marbles. And to each adult—including my DOH coworkers—who indicated in any way that they were stressed, I would hand two marbles. I reminded them this was a truly stressful situation and they had not lost their marbles.

I asked them to keep their two marbles with them at all times as a reminder that they HAD NOT lost their marbles and assured them that people from across the state, particularly from Bay and Washington counties, were thinking good thoughts and praying for them. This little scenario brought laughter or at least somewhat of a smile. (When Hurricane Ivan was headed toward my county, I received an e-mail from one DOH employee who reminded me that I had marbles and that they were praying for us in the Panhandle.)

Overall, I was struck by the 200 percent that everyone was giving during hurricane recovery. The nurse I had shadowed was a widow, living alone in a home that had major roof damage from Charley with ensuing water, mold and mildew damage. This nice lady was obviously very stressed, but came to work each day with a positive attitude and a desire to help "her schools." We had gone to a school where teenagers who had traveled from Virginia to help were serving lunch to anyone who would eat. It was very hot but these teens were smiling and serving lunch as though they were being paid big bucks to be there. A Salvation Army unit from Georgia supplied meals near the Charlotte County Health Department and one gentleman told me he had taken vacation days to come help. He said this was the most memorable "vacation" of his life and he was grateful for the opportunity.

The 2004 experiences were rewarding and touching for me and I am grateful I was allowed to go. ■

With me I carried a bag of marbles. And to each adult—including my DOH coworkers—who indicated in any way that they were stressed, I would hand two marbles. I reminded them this was a truly stressful situation and they had not lost their marbles.

Essence of Life Revealed Through Storm Recovery

Raam Hirlekar, M.D., Senior Physician, Orange County Health Department

After facing four major storms within a span of four weeks, and actually surviving them, most anything else would have been a piece of cake for Floridians.

Working in the Field Operations Center during Charley, fielding telephone calls from Orange County residents in need of advice or services, and manning the Special Needs Shelters (SpSN) during Frances and Jeanne provided me the opportunity to feel the core of the community up close—the young and not so young, the men and women, government agencies and the volunteers. Everyone gave their best with one goal in mind: Help anyone and everyone affected or to be affected by these storms.

We all tried to contain the disaster damage to fellow Floridians' emotional and physical health, to their properties and more importantly to their spirits, whenever and however we could, before and after the disasters struck us. It was a remarkable effort by everyone. We worked tirelessly in shelters 24–48 hours at a time and still were ready to go on longer.

Neighbors helped neighbors to clear fallen trees on their homes and to put tarps on their broken roofs. Some people set up little coffee and cookie stands in their front yards "free of charge" for those who had no power. It was a great display of kindness and love towards each other in the moment of need.

The storms kept on coming relentlessly week after week. It was a tremendous exhibition of the Nature's might. As much as it was unwelcome, it was a blessing in disguise to reassure everyone that deep down in our hearts, we all do care about each other, very much. And that is the essence of life. ■

Social Workers Respond to Emotional Rollercoaster Events

Susan Potts, Family Health Services, Tallahassee

If ever there was a time when the skills of public health social workers were needed, it was when Florida was hit with these record back-to-back hurricanes. Social workers from across the state volunteered to be part of the public health teams being sent into communities affected by the storms. Social workers utilized their expertise in communication and human behavior to help people recognize and employ their personal strengths to cope with the aftermath of the hurricanes. They also provided much needed support for the public health staff within those communities who worked long hours in adverse conditions to provide shelter and services to hurricane survivors.

Social workers participated on DCHAT teams and worked in Special Needs Shelters but they were also part of the Critical Incident Stress De-Briefing (CISD) Team providing education and support to Department of Health employees. They worked long hours in the heat without air conditioning, water or adequate plumbing, and many had experienced their own losses due to the hurricanes. The CISD team gave DOH employees the opportunity to talk about everything they had been through and receive information on coping with disaster related stress. Here are examples of what they had to say:

Shared stress management techniques • Offered a shoulder to lean on • Comforted and consoled Identified high risk individuals • Advocated for individual needs • Linked survivors with family members

"Several of us were members of Disaster Community Health Assessment Teams (DCHAT) who went door to door gathering information on mental, physical and environmental needs. We were able to provide the residents with a means to ventilate their frustrations and experiences. We helped to identify unspoken emotional and physical needs. When they had someone they could talk to, people were able to sort through their issues and figure out what to do."

Worked as part of a team • Organized resource guides • Restored optimism • Kept communication flowing • Enhanced coping skills • Renewed sense of hope • Supported personal strengths

"One woman I met had a two-year-old son that would not let her out of his sight. This was really getting on her nerves and she was yelling at him a lot. I was able to help her understand the reasons behind his behavior and gave her some tips on how to help him to feel safe. By giving her the reassurance that his behavior was a normal response to a very frightening event, she was then able to respond to him with more patience and understanding. I was really glad I was there to help that family recover."

Reestablished routines • Educated about self care • Supplied psychological first aid • Problem solved • Oriented deployed staff • Nurtured resilience • Developed discharge plans

"When I walked into the special needs shelter, many of the 326 guests were staring into space. As I went from person to person, he or she revealed the concern behind the blank stare. Many had recently undergone major surgery or lost a spouse within the last couple of months, but the primary concern was letting their families know they were safe. As that concern was dealt with, many began to socialize with other guests, providing support to each other."

R & R Seemed Unlikely at Shelter in Storm's Path; Compassion was Obvious

Janeen Langley, R.N., Children's Medical Services, Tallahassee

Storm Duty. I borrow this phrase from a friend who was an insurance adjuster for a company that insured mobile homes. He often referred to his days of work following a tornado, hurricane or other severe weather as "storm duty." He was usually gone for several days to some part of Florida or other part of the southeastern United States.

My storm duty was much more memorable. It wasn't just work—it was a time of insecurity and apprehension, sprinkled with tinges of homesickness but still molded by love, acts of kindness, bravery and the goodness of the human spirit.

It began on the windy, gray afternoon of Saturday, Sept. 25, 2004, in Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida. Our team of four rolled into the Sebastian River High School Special Needs Shelter—a large school built about 10 years ago and supposedly able to withstand Category 5 hurricanes.

Traveling since the early morning, we received our work assignments and prepared to work the 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift. With Hurricane Jeanne predicted to make landfall in our immediate area, rest was unlikely.

I was one of two nurses assigned to care for about 15 senior citizens from the surrounding area, most of them ambulatory with assistance. Most were couples, husbands and wives, some were even blood relatives. Many were transplanted Floridians from northern states such as New York and New Jersey. All had stories to tell, and all the stories, like their storytellers, were wonderful and memorable.

Jeanne was a predicted Category 3 hurricane at landfall. We were a little scared but generally in good spirits at the start of the 6:30 p.m. "lock down." Our entire group was isolated from the rest of the staff and patients in the shelter in a classroom that had one door that led to the outside -- no inner hallways or connections to another room or section of the building. Once tropical storm force winds began, no one could leave. We had one bedside commode behind a curtain for all of us to use for the 13 or so hours we were to be in the room. We had a telephone that connected us to the command center of the shelter, or for use in emergencies or for an urgent need.

We socialized as a way for us to keep our minds off the approaching storm and the unknown. We

got to know those around us by name. And we traded information about birthdays, favorite colors, kids and grandkids. As we attempted to distract our patients, we hoped they could distract us. As the winds began as a shrill whistle, and soon progressed to a loud howl, the roof began to leak, and the wonderful stories began to emerge from our group.

Names have been changed but I share these stories as examples and reminders of how we came together in this predicament and how we all were affected.

There was Al and his wife of more than 50 years, Emma. Al, obviously missing his right arm, began by telling stories that let me know his disability throughout his life did not hold him back.

As a young boy, Al worked at Yankee Stadium. Many of the baseball

players knew him because of his disability, but he very proudly told me how Babe Ruth considered him his "good luck charm" and would rub Al's head before he started a game.

Another at the shelter was Sally, a woman in her 90s although she didn't look it. She was self-ambulatory and had a chronic medical condition that required she take medication regularly. At first, everyone thought Sally was the "whiner" of the group. She was all alone. No one had accompanied her to the shelter.

She began to relate her story. She had been in an auto accident at age five. Two others had died in the crash. She told us how her mother had thought that her young child had died, too, and how she had pulled Sally from the wrecked car. She said the accident caused her to "have female trouble" and that she was never able to bear children of her own. Though Sally did need a little extra attention, we were happy to assist her, somehow knowing her "neediness" might have come from a deeper source.

And then there was Fred. He was a tall, distinguished-looking man in his early 70s, but when the sun went down, he lapsed into quiet confusion. He was not loud or belligerent or combative in any way, but he had one thing on his mind and that of going home.

Fred was hard-of-hearing and with the wind howling outside, we had to speak loudly enough for him to hear us, yet not so loudly as to awaken the few who had finally been convinced to lie down on their cots.

Fred tried to sleep once or twice, and even invited me to join him under his blanket, though quickly apologized for his impropriety.

Just when we thought he might doze off, he would get up from his cot and point to the door and say he knew he could go through it and get home. I assured him that the wind was too strong to leave and he sat back down. He was quiet for a few moments, then smiled at me and nodded his head towards the door with the question, "You wanna take a stab at it?"

His wife only smiled, and rolled her eyes. "He's like this all the time," she would say, and yet her patience never wavered with him. She would bend down to that painfully low cot to tuck his blanket around him and pat his hand. Again, a picture of enduring love was painted that stormy night.

We were all glad to see the light of morning and to hear the winds calm down enough to ease out the door to the closest restroom, holding on to the brick facade of the building as we made our way.

Our next shift was the next day from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. in the gymnasium. We were assigned to two rows of patients on cots, all spread out across the wide expanse of that stiflingly hot room. Some patients were going home or with relatives that morning. Others were not so fortunate. Two of these were Grace and Greta, unrelated and not knowing each other at all before circumstances had forced them to be placed in the gym a few cots away from each other.

Grace first caught my eye as she lay on her cot, crying softly. It was also very obvious she was suffering from Parkinson's or a similar disease, as her hands and head shook so much that I had to strain to hear the words she spoke. I asked her if I could help her in some way. She told me her husband had been hospitalized Friday before she had to come to the shelter on Saturday. It was Monday by now and she had no idea how he was and he had no knowledge of her whereabouts.

I had heard there were some landlines operating at our facility and I inquired about patients making phone calls. When I learned that a music room in the school was being used for this purpose, I pushed Grace over in her wheelchair and dialed the hospital number for her. She was connected to her husband and was able to talk with him and learn he was doing better and might get to go home soon. I stepped away to allow her some privacy while she talked, but I couldn't help but overhear her say "I love you" as she said goodbye and hung up. She was very happy after that call, and thanked me over and over for what was, to me, the smallest of deeds.

As we went back to the gym, Greta called out to me. "Put her over here by me, Honey," she implored. "Move her cot over here by mine so I can help her with her meals and things."

This unselfish offer came from a woman about Grace's age who was, herself, in a wheelchair. I moved the two of them so they were beside each other. They both smiled and thanked me. My heart once again was touched by this expression of unselfish love.

These are but a few of the stories. My few days at the shelter were a time of personal enrichment. I saw people there 20–25 years older than myself making do with what they had, and not complaining. I saw the power of the human spirit move in that place and beyond.

There were heroes all around us there—paramedics, firefighters and sheriff's deputies. And yet I was overwhelmed by the heroic acts of many of these elderly and infirmed: Acts of pure and simple love for their fellow man; acts of heroism which took the form of a smile, a gently touch or a kiss. May God continue to bless each of them wherever they are today. ■



Debris scattered around Charlotte County Health Department after Hurricane Charley. CHD buildings received interior damage as well.

The inside of a special needs shelter is prepared for Hurricane Frances, the second hurricane to threaten Florida in 2004.



Hurricane Tidbits

Governor Bush visited the department's Tallahassee headquarters in the midst of hurricane response and recovery. The purpose of his surprise visit was to meet and thank the many employees who worked tirelessly on the Incident Management teams.

During his visit, Governor Bush had the opportunity to experience first hand the dedication and passion of staff. In speaking with a number of department employees, he reminded them to also take time to look after themselves and their families.

DOH deployed 16 Florida State University (FSU) and eight Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) nursing students to aid in performing a health assessment of communities affected by Hurricane Ivan. While conducting the health assessments, the students used a cluster-sampling method to gain a quick knowledge of the needs of communities impacted by the disaster. Students formed 13 teams representing several areas of expertise in order to interview and inspect affected households in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Joining them were supervisors from the department Courtesy Nursing Facility, as well as additional public health workers. In addition to the survey teams, six Florida International University nursing students were deployed to special needs shelters after the evacuation in Monroe County, while 15 FSU students were assigned to Brevard and Putnam county shelters after Hurricane Frances.

Shortly after opening the Robarts Special Needs Shelter in Sarasota County public health workers realized they needed more oxygen capability and better facilities for their more medically-needy clients. The department soon after leased a nursing home facility in Venice, where some of the Robarts patients moved. Others moved to assisted living facilities and nursing homes in the Sarasota area.

An elderly woman who was sad and alone at the University High School Special Needs Shelter on her birthday was touched by the kindness displayed when others there celebrated her special day. The birthday party included a donut with a candle in it, an inflatable pillow that staff signed and everyone singing "Happy Birthday."

Love was in the air at the Discovery Middle School Special Needs Shelter during Hurricane Frances. A man staying in the shelter got down on one knee and asked his girlfriend to marry him with the entire shelter watching. How could she say anything but "yes" to his proposal?

Following Hurricane Charley, a volunteer nurse at the Hal Marston Special Needs Shelter in Orange County was concerned along with others there about the foods there for their diabetic patients. This caring nurse went to the grocery store and, digging into her own pocketbook, purchased groceries including a frying pan. She served omelets and fresh fruit for breakfast.

In the event Ivan would hit, my husband and I left our house to search for a generator. We usually lock our then five-month-old puppy, Daisy, in her crate and leave the older dog, a rat terrier named Roscoe, to "guard" our home. This time, we left both dogs out because my husband strongly felt that our search wouldn't take very long. I was concerned about my husband's confidence and I was really afraid Daisy would do her "business" inside. I asked my husband if he truly felt we wouldn't be gone very long.

"If we take too long and Ivan hits, we can call Roscoe," my husband says smirking.


"So what is Roscoe going to say?" I ask smugly as I tried to match his mockery.

"Well," he replied, "When Roscoe answers, we can ask if any damage was done to the house and he'll say 'Roof, Roof!'"


—Tina Kissner, Daytona Beach Immunizations, Volusia County Health Department

After Hurricane Frances moved through the Palm Beach area, staff at A.G. Holley State Hospital heard on a news report that the nearby VA hospital needed water. A.G. Holly has its own water plant and generates thousands gallons of water each day and its employees were prepared to help. As it turned out, the VA hospital needed water for flushing toilets and not drinking water. Disappointed that they couldn't help the VA Hospital, Jeff Voiles from A.G. Holley's engineering department came up with another idea, and within 18 hours hospital staff had contacted the press with messages in Creole, Spanish and English that the hospital would be distributing free drinking water to the public September 9 from 9 a.m. to noon. Employees worked with law enforcement and the town of Lantana and distributed 35,000 gallons of water.

Throughout the hurricanes, the Department of Health reminded people about health safety issues, including the protection measures against dangerous mosquito-borne diseases. Also, the department distributed 253,000 cans of DEET by September 10 to impacted areas. The DEET was dispersed through county health departments.



Pallets of supplies are readied for distribution to those in need following Hurricane Charley.



Response teams gather to discuss hurricane-related issues.

Special Needs Shelter Nurse Shares Experiences During Hurricane Charley's Approach

Cheryl Hammad, R.N., B.S.N., Senior Community Health Nurse, Orange County Health Department

The following experiences are just a few that helped bring awareness of the several ways necessary to enhance disaster preparedness. Little did we know these experiences at an East Orlando school gymnasium used as a shelter in preparation for Hurricane Charley would be the beginning of a chain of disasters unprecedented in Florida's history.

The first patient in the door was an elderly man who wanted a corner spot so he could make his dog comfortable. He left angrily when told pets could not stay in the shelter. The next person didn't fit any of the criteria for special needs and was upset to learn he was supposed to have brought his own sleeping material for the other side of the shelter and would not receive a bed. He also left, yelling that he'd just go back to his mobile home and it was my fault if he died in it. The third was a young man who'd had a serious back injury and had been recently discharged with a back brace. He fit special needs but he had with him his wife as a caregiver, his five little children, his adult sister and her child. When I explained that he and one caregiver were allowed on the special needs side and the rest would need to camp out on the other side, he went ballistic. Naturally, he wanted his wife as caregiver and to be with his entire family. Even if I didn't have the guidelines to follow, I couldn't imagine all the lively excited children among the many frail elderly and chronically ill patients we were expecting at our end of the shelter, not to mention around all the tubing and equipment. The man gathered his relatives and left. Soon they were back and his wife tearfully explained they came in two cars that "wouldn't make it across town to the next shelter with the winds picking up now," and they "couldn't go back to their mobile home as the police had made them evacuate." The man apologized for his earlier outburst and asked if they could all go to the regular part of the shelter if they went back home for more supplies and made it more comfortable for him to rest on the floor. He asked if nurses would still help him if needed, but he couldn't divide his family. A plan was formed and they left and came back with mattresses, blankets, food and toys to create a campsite at a corner for the regular shelter.

A school official came by to quickly respond to some of our needs and became irate when he found that some damage had been done to the gym floor. He shared that he had no idea why the school was chosen for a shelter since it had no backup generator. I notified the command center of this but it was too late to relocate.

Red Cross volunteers arrived and we divided duties for regular and special needs sections. Sheriff's deputies and firefighters arrived, as well, as did supplies later in the night delayed by impassable roads and grid-lock traffic. We received cots, but no blankets or linens made it to us.

Several stories of the people and demands remain fresh in mind, including that of the lovely couple who met during World War II. He'd been injured by mustard gas and she was a polio survivor who wore a leg brace. There was the couple in their 70s who couldn't sleep until I pushed their cots together so they could fall asleep holding hands, and the morbidly obese woman who stayed up all night whipping around in her mobilized wheelchair. Then there was the painful decision whether to allow in a severely medically needy man with his elderly mother and another grown son. The ambulance driver indicated they had been turned down admission at several hospitals and we were a last resort. The man had been in an auto accident 30 years prior that left him physically and mentally disabled. Despite best efforts, he smelled pretty bad and made noises all the time. We had to think of others in the shelter. I am proud that I held my ground as a patient advocate and they stayed in a little room we emptied and filled with three cots and supplies. We cleaned him up, and I checked on them hourly and helped when his mother needed assistance.

It was close to midnight before I remember sitting down to paperwork. It was freezing cold inside the gym, as the air conditioning system was set by computer and no one could reset it. Without blankets and heavy clothing, we all shivered until the power failed. That was the only reason we didn't mind the power going out so much. ■

The Robarts Shelter

A poem by Jennifer Bencie Fairburn, M.D., M.S.A., Florida State University College of Medicine Assistant Professor and state Department of Health, Division of Emergency Medical Operations, Hospital Liaison

Early on August 15th we opened the door,
And soon created a nursing home on an arena floor.
Max and Dr. MacLeod brought the meds,
Joel delivered linens for 500 beds.
Gregg and the Sarasota EM team repeatedly asked, "Do you have other needs?
More phones, faxes or perhaps computer feeds?"
Bob and the gang at ESF8, you're stellar, superb, simply "first rate!"
Tom, Bill, Kim and all the DOH leaders were great,
From our 7 a.m. poolside meetings until debriefings past eight.

The Miami-Dade nurses arrived like the force of the storm,
And took charge of the memory care unit as if it were "the public health norm."

The Sarasota nurses included Chris, Shelley, Janice and Ruth. . .
Whom we ordered home to bed, but whose repeated reply was "Just one more thing" instead!
Thanks to Judy from Palm Beach and Deb from Marion,
And Luis and his group who worked 7 p. to 7a.m.

There were doctors, nurses, dentists and RTs,
Podiatry, OT and even audiology;
We offered flowers, pet therapy, dancing and song,
Graham, our massage therapist, never rested for long!
Jim and his friends prepared pancakes each day,
and served meals from restaurants like Euphemia Haye;
JoAnn, Robbie, FEMA folks and others toiled day and night,
Finding permanent homes for those who had suffered such plight.

Thanks to David at Sarasota Ford for towing and re-keying a possessions-packed car,
Gestures like these brought media attention from near and far;
Robert and Viviana reported from a staffing agency one day,
then reappeared later as volunteers saying, "Forget the pay!"
Margaret from the community drove almost 500 miles,
Whatever it took to guarantee smiles.

The security guards diligently watched the doors those weeks,
and their "going above and beyond the call of duty" brought a sentimental tear to one's cheeks.
Fire rescue, SCAT and Sarasota PD, we appreciate your caring for us like family;
And by the way, Jean, Lynne and Kerry,
you will now forever be known as nursing home administrators to me!

To each person who walked through our door,
Whether providing medical services or bringing clothes to our "store;"
Thank you for your warmth and generosity;
And most importantly, to those victims whom we have had the pleasure to meet,
We so greatly admire your courage and wish you the speediest of recovery.

When walking to my car after having returned the arena key,
I realized that my life too had been forever changed by the winds of Hurricane Charley.

The Robarts Special Needs Shelter, located in the arena at the Sarasota County Fairgrounds, opened in the midst of Hurricane Charley for more than 350 special needs clients from Charlotte and DeSoto counties. Some patients had been evacuated from assisted living facilities and nursing homes, including one site that brought 50 Alzheimer patients. The shelter remained open for two weeks. ■

Seminole County Experienced Its Share of Hurricanes

Katherine L. Catterfeld, M.P.H., Health Promotion Manager,
Public Information Officer, Seminole County Health Department

Charley, Frances, Jeanne. All but Hurricane Ivan came to Seminole County. And in a normal fiscal year, a Seminole County Health Department employee works 2,080 hours. With the three hurricanes, 98 percent of employees on staff worked a combined total of more than 7,500 hours. That's equivalent to one full time employee working for 3.5 years!



Cots ready for hurricane victims in Seminole County special needs shelter.

Seminole CHD staff work to prepare the special needs shelter before the people arrive.



Seminole CHD employees earned approximately \$191,000 in addition to normal pay, an amount equal to nearly half of one entire payroll run. We are proud of the hard work and dedication of the staff at Seminole CHD and we have the numbers to prove it.

More impressive than the number of hurricanes that impacted the county were the actions of Seminole County Health Department employees. Here are just a few examples:

Kristi Hamilton, senior community health nurse, worked a 26-hour shift through Hurricane Charley at a special needs shelter and was deployed the next day to Desoto County with the Region 5 DCHAT team for five days to assess hurricane affected areas. Charley caused a broken water line and exterior damage from fallen trees to Hamilton's home, but Hurricane Frances caused significant damage due to two large trees that fell on her roof. When Hurricane Jeanne came through Seminole County, Hamilton was back working in the special needs shelter.

Kendra Johnson, Florida EIS Officer, is on call for statewide emergencies 24 hours a day. Because of roof damage and leaks in her home, Johnson was not deployed to other regions affected by Charley or Frances. It was after Hurricane Ivan that Johnson was deployed to Pensacola to assist the Santa Rosa County Health Department. She returned home to Central Florida the day Hurricane Jeanne made landfall and traveled back to the Santa Rosa County Health Department the day after Jeanne passed through Seminole County. Johnson logged more than 1,844 miles traveling between Seminole County and Santa Rosa County during the state's time of need.

Susan Thomason, senior clerk, was deployed on Sunday after Hurricane Charley as a part of Region 5 Disaster Community Health Assessment Team (DCHAT). Thomason's responsibilities included assessing the needs of Desoto and Charlotte counties. Thomason was deployed from her home and family for 7 days, despite damage to her roof, downed trees on her property, and no power or phones. When asked about her experiences, Thomason said, "I'd absolutely make the same decision again." ■

Thomason was deployed from her home and family for 7 days, despite damage to her roof, downed trees on her property, and no power or phones. When asked about her experiences, Thomason said, "I'd absolutely make the same decision again." ■

Timing is Crucial Following Disasters for Environmental Teams

Emily Wilson, R.S., M.P.H., Environmental Specialist at the Office of Environmental Public Health Medicine, Alachua County Health Department

The first few days following the four 2004 hurricanes were crucial time periods for the Environmental Health "Strike" Teams around the state assisting counties.

Refrigeration was a luxury, sewage was not going where it needed to be going, water systems were damaged and people were stressed—all factors pointing to potential second disaster. Staff members became impassioned about face-to-face education in order to prevent widespread disease. The following are some of the stories that helped bring cheers at the end of a day.

Teams working Hurricane Charley with lists of Adult Living Facilities in the hardest hit area found the travel tedious and long. Nevertheless, one team, Jeff Threlkeld and David Brown, found 10 locations in one day. They spoke to several people about the placement of generators and the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning. They spoke to people about what a "boiled water notice" meant. They also noted the difficulty the elderly were having due to lack of air conditioning. They noted where garbage was piling up or where portable toilets

were needed. People genuinely listened and appreciated their advice and work.

During this time, the teams distributed the brochures entitled "After the Storm" and "Disinfecting Your Well" and other information about safe food handling. A team member found one place that was serving up to 10,000 meals per day. No accurate listing of these locations existed and the teams never knew what they would find during the first week until they went out and looked. One team, Robert Knowles and Lori Stansbury, visited eight mobile home parks following Hurricane Ivan. They had parked their car next to a dumpster while speaking to one park manager. Upon their return to their vehicle, the dumpster had a serious fire that threatened an overhanging tree, a nearby mobile home, and their car. They used a fire extinguisher in their car and extinguished the fire. ■

Infant Nutrition Became Top Priority for WIC During Recovery

John Harrison, WIC Operations Manager, Tallahassee

WIC Program staff members around the state were quick to join in recovery efforts after each storm, serving in their home counties and as volunteers or joining crews elsewhere. Their top priority was assisting with infant feeding issues in disaster areas.

Many WIC clinics were among the last Department of Health offices to close in areas to be affected, and they were among the first to open following disaster. Some WIC clinics also remained open for extra hours and on Saturdays to accommodate the needs of their clients.

The WIC staff was instrumental in identifying families in need of supplies for infants, particularly in some rural areas that received less attention initially than the coastal areas. They were instrumental in establishing staging areas, supply routes and other logistics for distribution of infant food, formula, and other supplies such as diapers and baby wipes. They worked closely with the Emergency Operations Centers and charitable organizations as part of the overall mass care and feeding efforts. For transportation of supplies, they used every conveyance from diesel trucks to school buses.

Within days after Charley made landfall, for example, WIC staff distributed close to 120,000 bottles of ready-to-use formulas to strategic storage points in Charlotte, Hardee, DeSoto and Polk counties. It wasn't until a week later that other relief agencies began to place orders for baby formula for public distribution in those areas.

WIC staff was no longer driving trucks and unloading pallets of formula themselves by the time Hurricane Jeanne crossed the state. They had successfully raised awareness of the urgent and specific needs of the youngest disaster victims, and then networked with many others in order to meet the needs.

WIC staff served in a variety of other capacities, as well. They advised the Incident Management Teams, worked with advance recovery teams in the field, provided relief and assistance with crisis management to staff in shelters, and helped staff emergency phone banks. As with all programs throughout the department, the WIC team served in the enormous and memorable relief and recovery efforts of 2004. ■



WIC staff form a "bucket brigade" to unload trucks of infant formula for distribution to those in need following Hurricane Charley. WIC Program staff joined in several aspects of hurricane response including ensuring infant feeding issues were met.

September 16, 2004

Dear Ivan:

I heard you came by today. Sorry I had to rush off, but I really didn't think you were coming. Even in my absence, I noticed you made yourself very comfortable. You left your special touch in each of your favorite rooms and... you even rearranged all the furniture. Yes, I must admit, you are "quite the designer!!!"

I'm sure your day was busy because my friends said you visited them, too. Some said you stayed a while and the others said you stayed just long enough to put a little spin on things. So, where in the world did you find strength to do my neighbor's yard? You were creative and your visit really impacted us all. We not only realize your superb taste for fine homes and furnishings, but we also know you do interior and exterior design.

I just wanted to tell you thanks because since your visit, I've received calls from folks I hadn't heard from in quite awhile. Even your friends at FEMA and Red Cross dropped by to assess what you had done and Red cooked us up a nice meal. Seems as though your talents brought out the best in everyone.

Well, I'm going to close now. Let me also say I think you are one of a kind and I will never forget all the things that you have done.

Best regards,
Donna Johnson, S.R.N., and Poet Laureate
Escambia County Health Department

Letters of thanks

I am so thankful for my children and good health. I am thankful for the courteous staff I work with and am proud to say I work for the Department of Health. My daughter lost her home during Hurricane Jeanne. Her newborn was just four days old at that time. We watched as the roof of her home collapsed. The rain destroyed clothes and irreplaceable personal items. Her husband and children were safe. But I can't write in words the devastation felt by her family and the many others who experienced damage during this storm. I believe at first we were all numb and shocked.

I appreciate the thoughts and items that many of my co-workers brought in to my daughter's family. I want to say thank you to everyone and let them know we feel very blessed. I am thankful for my job and to have many caring and supportive friends.

Dora Sanchez, Okeechobee County Health Department

Lab Workers Awed by Precision of Two Storms

Roberta H. Lopez, Dr. P.H., BCLD (ABB), Bureau of Laboratories, Lantana

In laboratory work, our aim is for precision (repeatability) and accuracy (bull's eye). Consider the precision of two hurricanes, Frances and Jeanne, and the fact that they were formed weeks apart, and that each traveled many hundreds of miles across an ocean, and that the eye of each hurricane touched land just 4 miles apart. While we were awed statistically speaking, we also were awed to have two hurricanes hit our area and our Bureau of Laboratories—Lantana Laboratory during one season. We were stressed with Frances, but exhausted and in disbelief with Jeanne. Amazingly, we weren't knocked out cold, but rather we picked ourselves up immediately and actually felt strengthened and emboldened by seeing all around us the tenacity and fortitude of so many to withstand so much. Also, we as individuals and family members, are heartened and thankful for the generous help of FEMA, via the DCF food stamp program, to provide so many of us in our area with food stamp cards. ■

Four Severe Hurricanes Test Florida's Public Health Preparedness

Mark O'Neill, Ph.D., Preparedness Education and Training Coordinator, Office of Performance Improvement

Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne each brought unique challenges in addition to their own devastation during summer 2004. The Department of Health reached into its reserves of talent, goodwill and community partnerships to help the state and all the people in it weather the storms. Part of the team of dedicated public health professionals responding to these disasters were the members of the new Division of Emergency Medical Operations and others associated with public health preparedness (PHP).

While much time, energy and funding has gone into enhancing statewide preparedness capacities to respond to all hazards, the dramatic run of hurricane disasters provided an opportunity for those at the division of Emergency Medical Operations to prove the value of this investment.

Many of the new PHP employees came to the department from emergency management, hospital, military, police, fire and other response backgrounds. They have worked diligently to integrate their skills into the wide-ranging sphere of public health in county health departments as well as at Tallahassee. Over the past couple of years, PHP staff members have built strong working relationships with health care and community response partners. An axiom

that runs throughout this group is that a disaster is the wrong time to be passing out business cards.

Whether manning the ESF-8 desk at the State Emergency Operations Center or at a local Emergency Operations Center, assessing damage to county health department (CHD) infrastructure or supporting special needs shelter operations, preparedness employees allowed their public health colleagues to work more effectively. Those involved in coping with the hurricanes value and know that strong teamwork made all the difference.

These additions to the public health preparedness arsenal improved the department's ability to promote and protect the health and safety of all people in Florida during a most trying period. ■

Martin County Commissioners Honor CHD

The Martin County Commission gave special recognition to Martin County Health Department employees for their outstanding work during Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne.

Commission Chairman Lee Weberman presented a resolution of gratitude for outstanding efforts to health department staff and said the county is honored to have such competent and dedicated public health professionals in the community. The resolution was presented in December during the CHD's annual awards luncheon.

Weberman recalled one heroic effort of public health workers during Hurricane Frances. Those working at a special needs shelter were confronted with more than providing safe haven for the community's most vulnerable. Sometime in the night when the roof of a nearby Red Cross shelter began peeling away, those at the special needs shelter helped evacuate 600 people to the special needs shelter. This was accomplished during the eye of the storm, in pitch dark, without incident or injury.

The county commissioner also gave special recognition to environmental health staff who provided continuous coverage at the emergency operations center before, during and after both storms and quickly began environmental assessments to ensure the health and safety of residents. Martin County is located just north of Palm Beach County. ■

Highlands CHD Handled Vaccinations During Recovery

Robert "Bob" Kosiba, Emergency Preparedness Program Planner/Manager, Highlands County Health Department

My hat goes off to the whole Health Department of Highlands County. After getting through Hurricane Charley and Frances, the Highlands team needed to provide Hepatitis A vaccinations to more than 2,200 people on Saturday—the day Hurricane Jeanne was bearing down on the coast.

As people were parking everywhere, the Emergency Preparedness Program planner/manager assisted with traffic control with Sheriff's deputies, as well as coordinated the opening of the Special Needs Shelter. Highlands public information officer helped in locating additional vaccine and traveled with physicians to obtain it. The CHD's efforts were accomplished in such a professional, courteous, and organized manner. At about 5 p.m. rain bands began affecting the area and public health workers continued the immunizations and also began accepting patients to the local special needs shelter. These medical and non-medical personnel displayed no hesitancy in doing their work. The following Tuesday after Hurricane Jeanne, the clinic opened to provide another 2,000 vaccinations to those people in need.

The health department received numerous thank-you cards for their efforts and I want the State to know that CHD Director Paula Thaqi and her staff endured three hurricanes and a vaccination clinic in a matter of six weeks.

Hats off to all. ■

the advisor

Florida Department of Health
4052 Bald Cypress Way, Bin #C-24
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1711

Please send stories & information for the Mar./Apr. issue by e-mail to Juli Bergstrom-Wasson in the Office of Performance Improvement. The Health Advisor is available on the DOH Intranet & Internet websites.
Phone: (850) 245-4444, ext. 4013 Fax: (850) 922-0462 e-mail: Juli_Bergstrom-Wasson@doh.state.fl.us
Suncom: 205-4007 Suncom Fax: 292-0462

Polk CHD Staff Creates Emergency Daycare Centers for Health Care Employees

When Polk CHD employees heard schools would be closed for at least a week following Hurricane Charley, Polk employees stepped forward to create emergency child care centers for health care workers for hospital and private clinic employees during the crucial time. Locations for the centers were donated by two area churches, a city hall facility and a charter school. Parents who work at these sites were very appreciative. Following is one letter from an area hospital addressed to Polk CHD Director Daniel Haight from Jack T. Stephens, President and CEO of Lakeland Regional Medical Center.

On behalf of Lakeland Regional Medical Center, I extend our wholehearted appreciation for making arrangements to provide child care services for our employees to utilize while the schools were closed following Hurricane Charley.

Thanks to your quick planning, we were able to stay fully staffed and focus on our mission of delivering exceptional health care to the community. The First Baptist Church at the Mall was a good location, and our employees felt comfortable leaving their children with your staff. Without this option, many employees may have had to miss work, creating greater stress on their families and the hospital.

Thank you again for providing child care services. As always, it is a pleasure working with you. ■