

I participated in a conference call Tuesday evening 8/29/17 with Dr. David Teuscher, Director of HHS Region VI, regarding current and future activities dealing with the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey. David was a long time member of the Texas Delegation to the AMA, a member of the TMA BOT, and is a past president of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. He practiced in Beaumont until last year, and is a veteran of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike. Participating in the call were members of the TMA BOT, AMA Delegation, TMA senior management, and several county medical society executives from the large cities.

Of course, the first question physicians are asking is “how can we help?” The short answer for right now is to give money to the American Red Cross, and Hurricane Harvey donation sites being set by the California Medical Association and soon by the Texas Medical Association. The needs are unfathomable. David pointed out national volunteer registries such as [nvoad.org](http://nvoad.org), but it takes a long time for a physician to get credentialed. The Texas Medical Board is prepared to offer reciprocity for licensing for out of state physicians to come help, but I am not sure how much this will be needed.

In Texas, physicians are being organized in Dallas, Tarrant (Fort Worth), and Bexar (San Antonio) counties to help at the shelters that are being opened there. Dr. John Carlo, newly elected member of CSAPH and the current president of DCMS, has been coordinating the Dallas efforts.

There are PLENTY of doctors in Houston, but the immediate problem is that many still cannot get to or from their hospitals and offices due to high waters. Houston hospitals are waiving credentialing requirements in order to have enough doctors to help with urgent needs. The 3 David mentioned as being most critical this early in the game were dialysis and non-prescription opiate withdrawal.

The most direct areas where TMA and AMA can help are 1. Helping physicians reopen their offices, and 2. Helping physicians personally recovering their homes.

Remember post-Katrina scenes of Dr. Regina Benjamin laying out hundreds of pages of patient records to dry? Since so many physicians have transitioned to EHRs, it is not as simple as laying out your server to dry. EMRs in the cloud will be fine, and only hardware will have to be replaced. But many physicians will be facing enormous expenses replacing their systems. AMA might be able to play a role here working with national vendors that we have established a relationship with.

I shudder to think of small practices that have been hanging on by a thread that will never reopen.

Further down the coast, Corpus Christi fared pretty well and its hospitals are up and running. They were proactive in evacuating their critically ill patients, and my son who is a flight medic for Cook Childrens helped coordinate the transfer of 10 intubated NICU babies from Driscoll Children’s Hospital in CC. There were no hospitals in Rockport or Port Aransas, small coastal towns that have been pretty much wiped out. The next largest city affected was Victoria, population of about 65,000, and all of its hospitals are closed. UTMB in Galveston is relatively unaffected.

Many practices are affiliated with large systems such as UTMB, Memorial Hermann, Kelsey Seybold, etc. These will presumably have help getting back on their feet.

Tom Price at HHS has instructed CMS to offer 1115 and 1135 waivers (to eliminate the 3 day rule for SNF transfers) immediately.

A question was raised regarding the reopening of small hospitals – I am sure there are TJC guidelines for this, and one issue AMA can help with is utilizing our BOT representatives and contacting TJC to see how this can be facilitated.

There will be a tremendous need to help physicians and their families (the Alliance should be our partner here) whose homes, vehicles and personal property have been destroyed. The extent of this need is currently unknown, but many neighborhoods where the thousands of physicians who work in the Texas Medical Center live were flooded. Houston is a large spread out metropolitan area, and the surface area under water was estimated yesterday at 15x the size of Manhattan.

I decided last night to organize an educational program for I17 on lessons relearned between Katrina and Harvey.

This disaster will demonstrate how incredibly important it is to have physicians with practice experience at HHS. David Teuscher and Tom Price are long time friends, and David has been very active in the Republican Party and has good working relationships with Governor Abbott, our Senators, and many many others. He feels the federal preparedness and response for this has been excellent, and he stands ready to facilitate relief efforts wherever possible. He and the Secretary understand the needs of practicing physicians.

To summarize how the AMA can respond in the immediate future:

1. Work with TMA in their efforts to help physician practices rebuild
  - a. Fund raising through the AMAF
  - b. Facilitate discussion with the IT/EHR community through our established AMA relationships to help physicians who lost their EHRs
  - c. Support TJC and AHA in facilitating reopening of affected facilities
2. Fund raising, grants, loans for physicians' personal needs
3. Education about volunteer opportunities available, including [nvoad.org](http://nvoad.org)
4. Review our response to Katrina, Rita in terms of reducing or waving AMA membership dues – I don't remember exactly how we handled this, but we certainly don't want to offer less now than we did then
5. Plan special programming for I-17 for education and fund raising