

Hurricane Katrina Affects Nearly 20,000 Physicians— Up to 6,000 Patient Care Physicians Displaced by Flooding

Hurricane Katrina and subsequent flooding and related damage may have dislocated up to 5944 active, patient care physicians. That's the approximate number of physicians doing primarily patient care in the 10 counties and parishes in Louisiana and Mississippi that have been directly affected by flooding. Over two-thirds, 4,486, of those are in the three central New Orleans parishes that are being evacuated. This number is more than one-quarter of the total number of new physicians who start practice in the United States each year.

A large proportion of the practicing physicians in the area are also in training in residency programs. In the immediate three-parish New Orleans area, over 1,270 residents physicians were in training at the time the hurricane struck.

Of the physicians in the flood-affected areas, which includes 6 Louisiana and 4 Mississippi counties or parishes, the majority, 2,952, were specialists with 1,292 in primary care and 272 practiced obstetrics/gynecology. These totals exclude the residents in training who also provide various levels of primary and specialty care.

The two New Orleans medical schools, Tulane University and Louisiana State University, enrolled approximately 1,300 medical students in all years in 2004 and those students have been moved to other programs in the region, primarily to the Baton Rouge area and to east Texas. Their relocation has been coordinated by various agencies and organizations including the Association of American Medical Colleges, state and regional Area Health Education Centers (AHEC)

programs in Texas and Louisiana and the Liaison Committee on Graduate Medical Education.

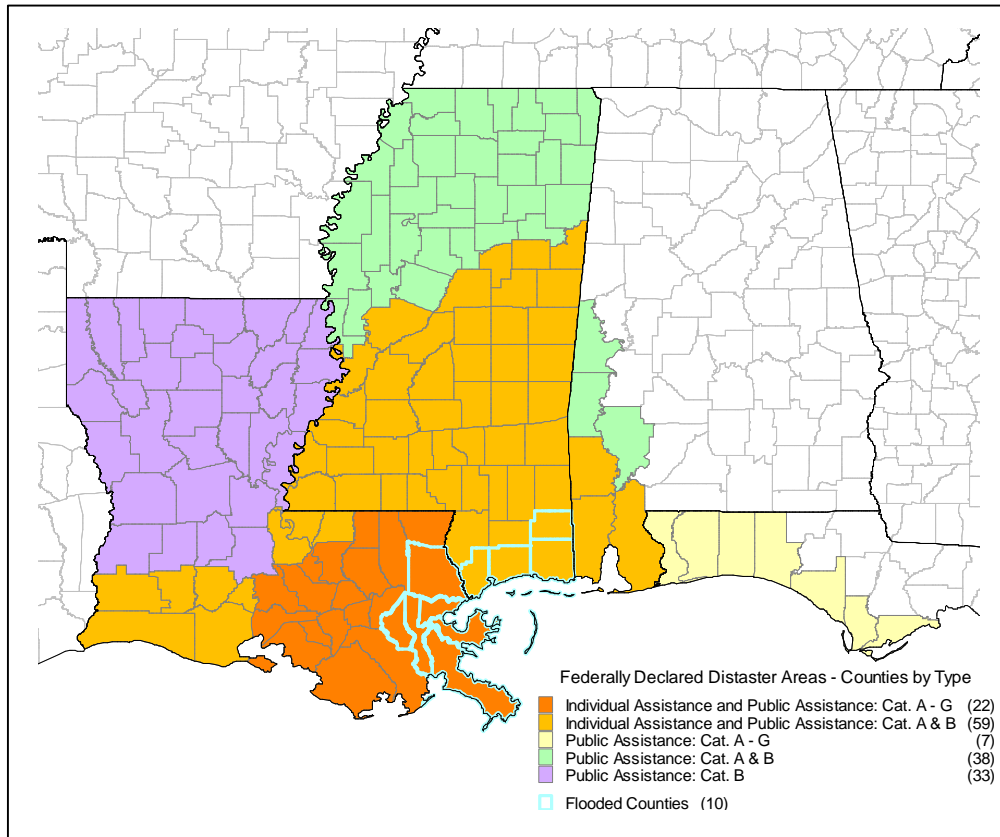
There are another 2,052 physicians in 16 Louisiana parishes that are identified by FEMA as being severely affected (level 1 Disaster Declaration). This includes 144 residents in training as well as 1,032 specialists, 724 primary care physicians and 140 OB/GYNs. Physicians involved primarily in administration, research or education are excluded from the total. Physicians working for the federal government are included in these numbers.

In all FEMA-designated areas on the Gulf coast, there were 16,427 active patient care physicians in 159 counties and parishes; 5,562 were in primary care, 1,058 in obstetrics and gynecology, and 9,638 in medical and surgical specialties and other fields of practice. There were an additional 2,742 licensed physicians in residency training

State licensing bodies for physicians have reacted in various ways to the emergency. Louisiana has modified its licensing rules to allow volunteer physicians to practice in the state and the Governor has issued changes to malpractice liability laws as part of the public health emergency. The Texas Medical Board is granting a 45-day temporary license allowing out-of-state physicians who have been required to follow their patients or who are volunteering to care for refugees to practice in that states. That license requires a Texas physician sponsor. The Federation of State Medical Boards has set up a 24-hour license verification process for Louisiana physicians who are trying to practice in other jurisdictions or as volunteers in the state. Mississippi has suspended the application process for physicians holding unrestricted licenses in order to accommodate volunteer physicians and to help absorb displaced doctors.

These data were drawn from the March, 2005 AMA Masterfile of physicians (current as of December 31, 2004), and FEMA posted information as well as data reported by the AAMC, Tulane and Louisiana State University Medical Schools, the Texas Board of Medicine and the State of Louisiana.

Map of Federally Declared Disaster Areas



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WWAMI Center for Health Workforce Studies
September 15, 2005.

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