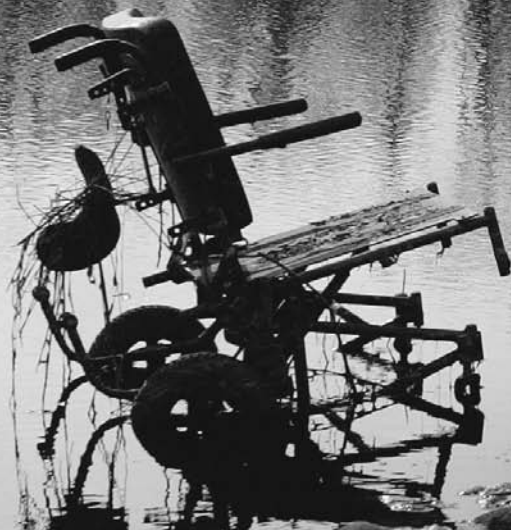


RESPONDING IN
TIMES OF NEED:



Federation of
STATE & MEDICAL
BOARDS

KATRINA & BEYOND

"PLAN FOR THE WORST.
PLAN FOR NO
COMMUNICATIONS.
ASK YOURSELF, 'WHAT
WOULD I DO?'"



RESPONDING IN TIMES OF NEED: KATRINA & BEYOND



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

James N. Thompson, M.D.,
President/CEO
Federation of State Medical Boards



As stewards of public protection, it is our duty to be ready for whatever might come our way.

As we all saw during the Hurricane Katrina crisis, a lack of coordination and systems left large gaps in the health care system that put the public at risk. I am pleased to report this was not the case with the state medical board community.

Working together, the staffs of the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) and its member boards performed admirably during the crisis in fulfilling our charge of protecting the public. The FSMB and state medical boards performed the difficult, dual task of expediting medical care for the victims of Katrina, while simultaneously protecting the public from dangerous doctors or imposter physicians.

In the wake of Katrina, many states are examining their emergency preparedness plans and systems. It is good to remember in such reviews that disasters come in all sizes, and that all emergencies are not created equal. A broken water pipe can destroy data just as easily as raging floodwaters.

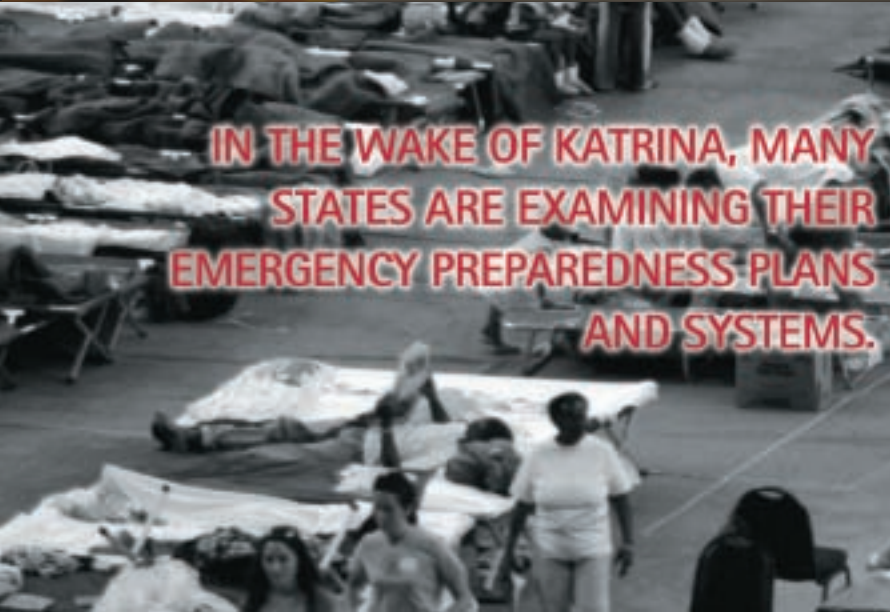
The FSMB is here to help its member boards in all kinds of adverse situations, big and small. This is why we've created this booklet –

Responding In Times Of Need: Katrina and Beyond. It briefly reviews:

- The response to the Hurricane Katrina crisis by the FSMB and state medical boards;
- Lessons learned; and
- Resources the FSMB offers to help member boards in times of need.

We hope you find it helpful. And we sincerely hope you'll never need to use its tools and lessons during an actual disaster. But as stewards of public protection, I know you'll agree it is our duty to be ready for whatever might come our way.





IN THE WAKE OF KATRINA, MANY STATES ARE EXAMINING THEIR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANS AND SYSTEMS.

SECTION ONE

HURRICANE KATRINA: A DISASTER UNFOLDS

All communications used by the board to link to the world – phone, fax, e-mail and cell phone – were down.

THE CRISIS AND THE RESPONSE

The most destructive and costliest natural disaster in U.S. history, Hurricane Katrina swept through the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, 2005, destroying lives and property, displacing people and wreaking havoc across an entire region.

For the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners, the hurricane created a worst-case disaster scenario. Staff and board members were prevented from returning to the board's offices in New Orleans' Central Business District for nearly six weeks due to flooding. The board's website, used by hospitals, health care clinics and other medical boards to verify physician licensure, was knocked offline. All other communications used by the board to link to the world – phone, fax, e-mail and cell phone – were down.

Even as stunned officials began assessing the epic scope of the disaster, two enormous migrations of physicians were already well underway. One was an exodus of an estimated 6,000 physicians out of the Gulf Coast region – doctors who were either displaced or

following evacuee patients to shelters in other states. The other was an influx of thousands of physicians who volunteered to help in the devastated region. One of the top priorities on the minds of many of these doctors was: I need to get licensed *now*.

Medical boards in the states surrounding the disaster area – used to a steady but manageable trickle of applications for licensure each day – were suddenly swamped with phone calls, faxes and e-mails. However, with the Louisiana board website out of commission, the main vehicle for verifying licensure of the state's displaced physicians was unavailable. Even more troubling was Louisiana's inability to verify the legitimacy of physicians coming into the devastated region to help.

"We simultaneously started getting license applications from Louisiana doctors coming out of state and volunteer doctors from other states seeking to help out in Texas," said Jaime Garanflo, manager of Customer Affairs for the Texas Medical Board. "All of a sudden the fax machine started going wild."



In Mississippi, the medical board's offices, located upstate in Jackson, escaped the devastation endured by the state's coastal communities. But the board still faced the huge task of dealing with hundreds of displaced doctors from Louisiana and placing volunteer physicians where they were most urgently needed.

In the days and weeks to follow, an executive order by Louisiana's governor issued shortly after Katrina hit would complicate matters even more for the state's medical board.

HUNDREDS OF MEDICAL STUDENTS, RESIDENT-PHYSICIANS AND PRACTICING PHYSICIANS LOST PROOF OF THEIR MEDICAL EDUCATION AND POSTGRADUATE TRAINING.

"The governor issued an order that we would take any and all doctors," said Dr. Kim Edward LeBlanc, M.D., Ph.D., president and interim executive director



of the Louisiana board. "That was fine if they were from another state. But we couldn't verify those coming in from other countries. The order was well-intentioned, and we needed the help, but it had unintended consequences, and we had stories of people abusing the situation."

And, of course, the Louisiana medical board wasn't the only health care entity knocked out of commission by the hurricane. Across the Gulf Coast, medical schools, hospitals and physicians' practices were destroyed by floodwaters. Hundreds of medical students, resident-physicians and practicing physicians lost proof of their medical education and postgraduate training.

In the stricken region, imposter physicians and doctors with significant disciplinary histories began showing up at hospitals and clinics. The Federation of State Medical Boards Physician Data Center – a repository of data on more than 700,000 licensed U.S. physicians – began receiving calls from previously sanctioned physicians seeking license verification so they could "help." Emergency clinics in Mississippi and Louisiana reported uncredentialed doctors with questionable skills showing up to assist hurricane victims.

Looking back on all that transpired, Dr. LeBlanc said that he would urge other boards to plan not only for emergencies, but also for the worst-case scenario.

"Plan for the worst," he said. "Plan

for no communications. Ask yourself, 'What would I do?'"

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS FOR THE LOUISIANA BOARD

- No access to medical board office for six weeks
- No access to files
- No access to computer servers
- No ability to check licensees
- No phone, Internet or cell phone service
- Physicians needed to treat hurricane victims
- Rapidly deploying hundreds of medical volunteers

ONGOING CHALLENGES FOR THE LOUISIANA BOARD

- Louisiana governor's executive order: Licensed physicians from any state or country do not need licensure in Louisiana
- Who will make decisions?
- Where is staff?
- Where will they live?
- Access to computer servers
- Setting up temporary board office
- Who will answer the telephone?



HURRICANE KATRINA: A DISASTER UNFOLDS

"We looked for ways to slash red tape. We did the least amount we felt comfortable with to get people licensed and still protect the public."

– Jaime Garanflo,
Manager of Customer Affairs,
Texas Medical Board

RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

Medical boards, along with numerous other governmental entities across the Gulf Coast, suddenly found their emergency plans inadequate, misunderstood or simply overwhelmed by the unprecedented situation.

With thousands of doctors moving in and out of the crisis areas, medical boards needed to quickly find ways to get physicians practicing while simultaneously protecting the public. Working together, the FSMB and its member boards, with help from affiliated national organizations and Administrators in Medicine, began to put ad hoc systems in place. In the heat of the crisis, "best practices" gave way to "best practices under the circumstances."

VERIFYING LOUISIANA LICENSES

"Shortly after the hurricane hit, it became apparent that the Louisiana board was going to need our help, so we moved to quickly establish an emergency response team and put systems in place to support the board," said Tim Knettler, vice president of FSMB

Member Resource Centers and Services.

With the use of its national database of physician data, the FSMB set up and posted on its website a 24-hour system to verify, at no charge, Louisiana physician/physician assistant licensure to state medical boards, disaster aid facilities and hospitals. This system, which operated throughout September 2005, verified the licenses of more than 1,200 displaced doctors, enabling them to be quickly available for hurricane victims both in and outside of Louisiana.

"The Louisiana board had sent a completely updated file of their licensees in late July to our All Licensed Physicians Database so we were able to quickly and effectively provide this emergency service," said David Hooper, director of the FSMB Physician Data Center. "This ensured that the hundreds of verifications we were soon providing to medical boards, hospitals and clinics in the disaster area were up-to-date and accurate."

The quick establishment of the verification system shut down a surge of phone calls to the FSMB from sanc-

continued on page 8



ONE OF THE TOP PRIORITIES
ON THE MINDS OF MANY OF
THESE DOCTORS WAS:
I NEED TO GET LICENSED NOW.

