

Date: 7 November, 2005  
To: All Commissioned Corps Officers  
From: United States Surgeon General  
Subject: Update on Hurricane Katrina, Rita and Wilma Response

We are now in the eleventh week of the Hurricane Katrina response, and the Commissioned Corps is still significantly involved in this mission. With two more storms following Katrina's lead onto our shores, we have continued to support local communities and states in their efforts to regain stability. Much has been achieved during this time, and more work still remains.

PHS officers are supporting 14 ongoing missions in Louisiana, where RADM Rick Barror, of FDA, formerly the Executive Officer of the Louisiana SERT, is now heading up the effort as the SERT Commander. And for those of you who note the change in reference, on 01 November, CAPT Barror assumed the position of Chief Engineer Officer, and received a promotion to RADM. Similarly, CAPT Carol Romano of NIH, who was instrumental in creating the Federal Volunteer Line within the first couple of days after Katrina landed, has become the new Chief Nurse Officer of the PHS, and was also promoted to RADM. Congratulations to both new Assistant Surgeon Generals.

In Florida, 65 Commissioned Corps officers continue to give help to the state. RADM Sam Shekar from HRSA, SERT lead in Florida, was in Tallahassee working with the Florida Secretary of Health and his staff. Immediately after the storm, our officers supported special needs shelters in southern Florida. But in the ensuing days, as the shelters were able to place patients elsewhere, our officers formed medical strike teams along with their partners in the Broward County Health Department and the Veterans Administration. These teams are positioned in mobile medical vans. As they move throughout the county, they are attempting to visit areas that are still without power and have large numbers of elderly residents. What they are finding are people with fragile health who have run out of medications, have no power or refrigeration, have not seen a medical provider, and sometimes are not doing well. In these scenarios, our teams are making a terrific positive impact on the public health of hundreds of people every single day. Our officers are also offering assistance and guidance in Orlando, as part of the Joint Field Office.

Much of the Corps' response activities in Mississippi and Texas are concluded, but our involvement in Louisiana and Florida is ongoing. After weeks of dedicated service on deployment many officers are now returning to their families, homes and offices. Thanks and appreciation to all who have contributed and continue to contribute to this valiant effort, whether through coordination, patient care, environmental health missions, public health assessments, or by keeping the offices at home running smoothly.

Without the dedication of the officers who ran our offices while others deployed, and their willingness to pick up extra work, our programs, research and clinics would be lagging. The Corps, from all sides and angles, has served as a team on a united front.

As we now look to the charge from President Bush to prepare for the possibility of a pandemic or Avian Flu, there is a greater sense of confidence in our capabilities. Through our recent experiences in emergency response, we have become a stronger and more unified Corps, ready and willing to prepare, prevent and respond when called upon.

Again, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to every member of the Commissioned Corps. You are all heroes in health. Each of you protects, promotes, and advances the health and safety of our Nation.

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