



# What I learned during the 2017 hurricane season



Nurses' values and skills shine in times of crisis.

**I WATCHED** with great pain the damage, and for many the devastation, created by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. I was reliving August 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina destroyed my hometown and changed normalcy for my family forever. Twenty-six of my New Orleans family members—stripped of incomes, homes, schools, familiar medical and dental services, normal daily schedules, and social networks—called our Southlake, TX, home their home for many months.

## Eerie reminders

Now, 12 years later, the television images are eerily familiar. I could relate in such a personal way as victims were interviewed, describing their fears and losses. Similar fears and losses still haunt my family today, but we now approach life with a “new normal” psyche. We never got over it, we just moved on.

I saw the open arms of first responders, volunteers, and strangers dedicated to helping those in need in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, and the Caribbean, just as we had witnessed after Katrina. Back then, after the first evacuees arrived in Southlake, when we were still in shock, church members and neighbors were at my front door with smiles, positive attitudes, prayers, and food. The local police knocked on our door and asked how they could help when they saw the 12 cars with Louisiana license plates parked outside. The evacuees left home without much but a change of clothes, thinking they would be gone just 2 or 3 days. After all, we were all seasoned hurricane survivors who had experienced years and years of anything Mother Nature would hurl at us.

## Nursing's response

Thinking about the similarities of these past and current events, here are some of my observations about nursing. I witnessed these realities during Katrina, and I'm seeing them again now.

- **Be ever ready.** Extreme conditions arise with or without warning. The healthcare workforce response can make the difference in the degree of



Flooding from Hurricane Harvey in Port Arthur, Texas.

- community suffering and rate of recovery. Being ready to adapt and provide essential care under extreme conditions is a professional imperative.
- **Our actions reflect our values.** Once again, nurses and the entire medical profession stepped up to the plate, caring and leading during these extreme times and providing examples of our values in action.
- **Nurses are leaders wherever they are.** Whether caring at the bedside or in the field, nurses demonstrated the definition of leadership: The act of making a difference by applying integrity and values to bring out the best in ourselves and others.
- **Nursing care fundamentals are disaster basics.** No emergency changes the basic standards of nursing practice, code of ethics, competence, or values.
- **Disasters affect *all* of us.** When the storm is over, the disaster is not. The impact of the hurricanes is still being measured as we continue to discover how deeply wounded many communities are. Even if we don't live in an affected area, we'll all feel the effects of these tragedies for many years.
- **Capture the stories now.** Highlighting the actions of the everyday nursing heroes is important. Don't wait until there's “enough time” to interview and publish. The bottom line? Emergencies are unpredictable, nursing's response is not.

*Lillie Gelinas*

Lillie Gelinas, MSN, RN, CPPS, FAAN  
Editor-in-Chief  
lgelinas@healthcommedia.com

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