

NC EMERGENCY WORKERS

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ONLY A FEW DAYS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA SLAMMED INTO MISSISSIPPI'S GULF COAST, DOCTORS, NURSES AND EMERGENCY PROVIDERS FROM NORTH CAROLINA ARRIVED TO HELP.

NORTH CAROLINA TEAMS HAVE BEEN WORKING OUT OF A MOBILE HOSPITAL IN WAVELAND, MISSISSIPPI RELIEVING A LOCAL HOSPITAL THAT WAS DISABLED IN THE STORM SURGE. THE MOBILE HOSPITAL IS THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND IN THE UNITED STATES. IT'S A PROTOTYPE THAT'S GOTTEN A TEST RUN IN KATRINA'S WAKE. ROSE HOBAN REPORTS:

SOUND: triage: Start with scene of woman getting meds for grddtr interacting with nurse from Pitt. "Triage to Pharmacy??? Go ahead. Can you get me a two week supply of singular 10 mg and an Advair inhaler? No problem." Fade under question about Depakote...

Jessica Brown is a nurse practitioner who works at Pitt Memorial Hospital in Greenville. But this week, she's practicing in a blue plastic tent in Waveland, Mississippi. She's one of a contingent of North Carolina health workers providing relief to this community devastated by Hurricane Katrina. A few days earlier Brown ordered medications for Wanda Lott's daughter *and* for her granddaughter, who has epilepsy. Lott says they had only three days of medications left.

SOUND: Wanda Lott: Oh, I'm so happy, my little granddaughter, it's going to really help her...

The North Carolina group is working out of a mobile hospital, erected in the parking lot of a destroyed strip mall about a mile and a half inland. The entire town was submerged under more than 25 feet of water when Katrina pushed ashore. Floodwaters destroyed the mall, *AND* a small community hospital a mile down the road. That's where

Lott used to receive care. Lott says this is her second visit to the mobile hospital.

SOUND: Wanda Lott: It's incredible they have just, I mean, we're out here, once, twice, trying to get the medication. But they're here every day and they're doing an incredible job. We appreciate it so much. *sniff*

The hospital's core is a high tech tractor trailer that includes a 12-bed emergency room and small operating room. Patients get treated under white tents attached to the trailer. The bright blue triage tent sits in front.

Scott White from Carolinas Medical Center says once they put up the tents, patients just came.

SOUND: Scott White: We're not able to do any advertising, or anything like that here, that's not available in this community. We put a little sign out in front, at the main intersection out here, that just said hospital with an arrow pointing to it. And people have found us.

About 300 patients a day have found their way to the tent hospital. That's as busy as most big-city Emergency Rooms. White says a grant from the Department of Homeland Security paid for most the 2 million dollar prototype:

SOUND: Scott White: This facility was born out of 9 11. One of our physicians at Carolinas Medical center and a colleague of his in emergency medical services were thinking about how to handle it if there were a terrorist event anywhere around Charlotte, so through some brainstorming, this idea was born

Health care workers from all over North Carolina are staffing the hospital. About 70 people go for a week at a time. Many health care workers get trained for disaster response, but like emergency doctor Lee Garvey from Charlotte, they seldom use that knowledge. He came the first week, and got so much out of it, he came again on his own time:

SOUND: Lee Garvey: I was able to free up my clinical schedule for a week but my week that I was able to free up didn't coincide with the organized travel. So, uh, so I just drove down...

At first patients came with hurricane-related injuries. But as time goes on, patients arrive needing treatment for chronic diseases. And the injuries are changing too. Doug Whitt hurt his arm cleaning-up:

SOUND: Doug Whitt: I was pulling sheet rock and fell through a window and cut it. I cut all the way it to the bone I came here to this place I couldn't have made it to the hospital. I had to get somewhere quick. The girl tied a rope around my arm, cause the blood was going everywhere.

Whitt pushes his sunglasses back onto his deeply tanned face to cover his eyes as he talks about how grateful he is the hospital's there:

SOUND: Doug Whitt: It touch me to my heart, man, yes it did. I mean, I don't know how to explain it, it's like the north helping the south or whatever. *Laughs.* I think its wonderful. All people should get together like this. If the world were like this everywhere, it'd be alright

The mobile hospital is the only health care facility in the area. The bridge connecting Waveland to Gulfport – and other hospitals – was destroyed in the storm. At the nearby community hospital workers are putting in overtime to rebuild. North Carolina health authorities say they hope to transfer care of the community back to the local hospital sometime in the end of October.

I'm Rose Hoban, North Carolina Public Radio, WUNC.