

Houston, We've Had a Problem

We need to preface this blog with the fact that we are from California and Connecticut. Although proud to call Houston our current home, neither of us had ever had any experience with floods before Hurricane Harvey. Even in Houston, which has survived many floods, Hurricane Harvey was altogether a different beast. The category 4 hurricane was downgraded to a tropical storm as it hit the coastline, but it dropped at least 50 inches of rain on the Houston metropolitan area. When a storm is dubbed a "1000-year flood" and has been determined to be the costliest natural disaster in this country's history, there is no doubt that Hurricane Harvey was extreme, even for Texas.

Preparations for the hurricane were under way many days before the storm. We, like almost all the other residents, filled our bathtubs with water, bought as many canned goods as we could fit into our shopping carts, and went from store to store searching for that elusive case of bottled water. Likewise, our institution had taken steps to prepare for Hurricane Harvey by activating the ordering of additional supplies, adjusting schedules, and eventually activating the external disaster code. We were very fortunate that the areas of Houston where we live were not as affected by the flooding as many others. Watching the local news was eye-opening because just minutes away from our apartments, people were trapped in their neighborhoods or homes and had to be brought to safety by boat.

In the weeks after the hurricane, we realized just how far-reaching the effects of flooding are, especially when it comes to the health of our patients. Physical damage to cars, homes, and businesses was not the only concern. In the medical ICU, for instance, many patients who had no insulin left presented with diabetic ketoacidosis. In the children's hospital, children who did not have their inhalers presented with status asthmaticus. Infections from the floodwater and how patients with ventricular assist devices would keep their batteries charged should their homes lose power were situations that had never crossed our minds before experiencing Hurricane Harvey.

We were awestruck by the spirit of generosity that seemed to overtake our institution, the city of Houston, and the entire country. Many of us were not at the hospital over the weekend when the flooding began, but we drove in as soon as it was safe to do so and relieved those who had been at the hospital for several days. Countless employees slept in whatever room or office they could find and were up early to get back to work. In the pharmacy, the residents, preceptors, and technicians did whatever was necessary to help, including verifying orders, filling the Pyxis machines, and bringing IVs up to the units. Furthermore, the outpouring of support for the affected cities in Texas was almost overwhelming. From just about everyone we knew reaching out regularly to make sure we were safe to the Houston Texans' J.J. Watt's raising of over \$37 million for the hurricane victims, the relief efforts were perhaps on the largest scale we had ever seen. And although Houston has since dried out, gas prices remain 30 cents higher, many businesses are closed, and even more people are still without a home. Indeed, we expect the recovery process to take years in some aspects, yet in the storm's aftermath, the spirit of Houston is as friendly, determined, and optimistic as ever.

We certainly hope that we never have another Hurricane Harvey, but this experience has made us better pharmacists, better team players, and proud to live and work in a city as great as Houston.

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