

Letter from Director, NIH and Deputy Director for Extramural Research to NIH Research Community

September 04, 2005

Dear NIH research community,

We are all profoundly saddened by the loss of life and the suffering of so many as a result of hurricane Katrina. Our thoughts go out to all those who have been injured and lost loved ones, homes, or even communities.

NIH's first response, as a medical and public health agency, has been, understandably, to address the immediate medical needs of the affected population. We are participants in the Department of Health and Human Services Task Force to respond to these events, and anticipate that approximately 250 NIH staff members will be deployed to the field; we are working with academic partners around the country, consulting and coordinating, to provide needed specialized medical information. We have made 100 beds available in the NIH Clinical Center, as necessary for patients with special needs that the Clinical Center is uniquely suited to meet. These activities continue to develop very rapidly.

We must also look to the future, however, and to the needs of our research community in the affected area. Although we do not have complete information yet we have been able to contact directly the leaders of the concerned academic institutions. We understand that in many areas, the damage to the research infrastructure has been profound, and that valuable, unique research resources may have been lost, or in all likelihood will be lost. In addition, many investigators may not be able return to their laboratories for several weeks to months.

This crisis has elicited tremendous generosity from the biomedical research community. We are grateful for the many of you who have expressed a willingness to help, particularly with the placement of students, postdoctoral fellows, and investigators. To keep everyone informed of developing events and to help NIH manage the outpour of offers of assistance, we have created website pages (<http://www.nih.gov/about/director/hurricanekatrina/index.htm> and <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/katrina/index.htm>), and we are partnering with a number of organizations. A website recently created by the Association of American Medical Colleges (<http://www.aamc.org/katrina.htm>) for example, will help broker interactions between medical school researchers (from students to investigators) who cannot return to their classes or laboratories in the foreseeable future and would like temporary placement elsewhere, and those of you offering placement, including the NIH intramural program. We are also partnership with other organizations to provide similar services for those not directly affiliated with a medical school. The NIH website will list those URLs as soon as they become available. We will continue to update the post-Katrina information on the NIH website as we hear about your needs.

We have also been asked by many what specifically can NIH do for investigators and institutions in this time of crisis. NIH is ready to provide assistance in a number of ways – from extensions in time that include personnel costs and replacement of equipment, supplies, and unique resources damaged or lost as a result of the storm; to flexibility in grant application deadlines. NIH also works with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to ensure that investigators and their institutions have opportunities to obtain maximum support. We have already published two hurricane-related Notices in the NIH Guide, and a third, containing additional information will be published shortly. Hurricane-related information particular to investigators and their institutions is also available at the NIH Office of Extramural Research website (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/katrina/index.htm>). We encourage you to visit this and the parent NIH website for the most recent information.

The response to Katrina will require effort, flexibility, and cooperation, but first and foremost it will require a profound commitment and solidarity - the entire NIH, the entire biomedical research community - must stand together with those of us who have been struck by this disaster.

Thank you very much for your many expressions of concern and generosity.

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