

# EDITOR

Letter to the

## **To the Editor:**

I was deeply touched by a letter from a physician whose practice was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. "You never realize what you mean to your patients or what your patients mean to you until something like this happens," wrote Merlin R. Wilson, MD, FACP, FACP. "There have been more tears and hugs in our office since I am back than I ever saw in the 25 years prior to this disaster."

I find it gratifying to help doctors reopen after a natural disaster because that's when their services are needed most. The entire mission of the Health Care Recovery Fund of the American Medical Association (AMA) Foundation is to help physicians recover quickly from professional losses, allowing them to deliver timely care to patients.

Since 2005 we have provided grants totaling \$726,000 to 317 physicians in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The recipients have used these grants to help rebuild their practices in the wake of damage from Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma and severe storms and tornadoes in Georgia. Incidentally, recipients do not need to be members of the AMA.

Here's a cheering report from another physician we helped, Patricia Estrada, MD: "I want to voice my gratitude for the Health Care Recovery award. It has served as both a financial

and emotional boost for me in the trying post-Katrina era. My original office was destroyed, but I have set up a new office and continue as an independent family practitioner."

Encouraged to be of such service, we are preparing for future disasters. (We have faced the fact that the Federal Emergency Management Agency declares an average of 52 major disasters each year.) Leading the way through AMA Foundation's Uniting for the Future of Medicine (UFM) campaign is Jeremy A. Lazarus, MD, Vice Speaker of the AMA House of Delegates, and Chair of the AMA Foundation's UFM Steering Committee. Dr. Lazarus seeks to expand the Health Care Recovery Fund through UFM. His goal is to have sufficient resources to respond quickly to aid as many affected physicians as possible. In dollars, we project annual distributions of grants totaling about \$300,000/year.

For information about UFM and the Health Care Recovery Fund, please contact the AMA Foundation. In an emergency, often all we have left is people helping people.

*Ronald M. Davis, MD  
President, American Medical Association*

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